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VALDIVIA FIGURINES AND PUBERTY RITUALS: AN HYPOTHESIS

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Introduction

Since the Upper Palaeolithic, in all known societies, iconography expresses aspects of non-material culture, but its messages are difficult to recover from excavations, especially in the New World. The ceramic *corpus* of the Valdivia culture, like all others, carries traces of ancient rituals and ideologies. In my opinion, these can only be discovered through systematic iconographic analysis. One can discern a certain logic among themes, motifs, and forms. In decoding iconographic messages, a scholar strives to understand hidden cultural implications.

Valdivia (3500 B.C. to 2000 B.C.), the first ceramic-producing culture of Ecuador, developed along the Pacific coast. Valdivia is defined by ceramic artifacts exhibiting iconographic complexes, at first geometric, but later anthropomorphic or zoomorphic. The Valdivia culture's most unusual creation is its figurines. The earliest were made of stone, but later figurines are ceramic. Figurines can be classified on the basis of their plastic decoration (Di Capua 1973), techniques of execution (Meggers, Evans, and Estrada 1965:95-102), seriation (Hill 1972-74), style (Lubensky 1991), or upon the sexual traits represented (Marcos and Manrique 1988). On the basis of detailed study, I have identified precise variables in the iconography of these figurines. These variables have enabled me to propose fresh categories that, in turn, have led to a new understanding of the symbolism of Valdivia figurines.

In this paper I hypothesize that Valdivia figurines reflect particular rituals and symbolic acts. These pertain to the successive stages in the physical development of the human female. Both the physiological stages and the rituals marking them can be deduced from the details of Valdivia figurines.

Evans, Meggers, and Estrada (1959:11, 68) pointed out that the heads of some Valdivia figurines are cropped or shaved. This observation has inspired me to attempt a reconstruction of the context of this iconography. After studying hundreds of examples in which shorn heads correlate with bodies without any indications of breasts, without curves, and without arms, I formulated the hypothesis that the conjunction of these traits must correspond to a certain logic and must have been part of a symbolic code. It became clear to me that these Valdivia figurines are sculptural representations of a female body at the beginning of puberty. The middle of their heads lacks any representation of hair and realistically reproduces the appearance of a pate that has been shaved or depilated, possibly as part of a ritual, as in many twentieth-century South American communities (Armstrong and Métraux 1948:372, 378-379; Holmberg 1948:460-461; Kirchhoff 1948a:389-390, 1948b:875-876; Lévi-Strauss 1948:337; 361-369; Lowie 1948:37; Métraux 1948:116; Steward 1949:705, 708; Stout 1948:262).

I have become convinced that hairstyles, on figurines depicting adult women, including pregnant ones, may also have had a symbolic function. Via systematic analysis I can approach an understanding of the implications of female iconography within the social and existential contexts of the woman in Valdivian society. Through an analysis of the figurines' iconography, I interpret their probable symbolic content to reconstruct female puberty rituals.

The environment of the inland site of Loma Alta, in the foothills of the Colonche mountains, was the humid tropical forest. This site has yielded earlier dates than those closer to the Pacific Coast, suggesting that, contrary to the opinion of Evans, Meggers, and Estrada (1959:7-8), the Valdivia culture originated in the Ecuadorian interior, and not on the Pacific coast.

Betsy D. Hill established eight phases for Valdivia (Hill 1972-74). Her seriational sequence was confirmed by later excavations

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and analysis of the frequency of decorative motifs. Hill's sequence is now in common use by scholars and radiocarbon dates have been established for material in association with artifacts from the various phases. An estimated chronology in calendar years is set out below and employed in this paper:

Valdivia 8	2059 - 1810 B.C.[1]
Valdivia 7	2286 - 2160 B.C.
Valdivia 6	2413 - 2287 B.C.
Valdivia 5	2539 - 2414 B.C.
Valdivia 4	2667 - 2540 B.C.
Valdivia 3	2793 - 2668 B.C.
Valdivia 2	3047 - 2794 B.C.
Valdivia 1	3500 - 3048 B.C.

Recent studies have suggested that the last two phases of Valdivia (7 and 8) are really contemporaneous.

Valdivia settlement patterns resembled those still followed by the indigenous inhabitants of the Andean *selva* (Lathrap, Collier, and Chandra 1975:43). Excavations at the site of Real Alto (Lathrap, Marcos, and Zeidler 1977) have revealed many characteristics of this horticultural and ceramic culture, especially the degree of ceremonialism practiced by the resident population.

The Real Alto excavations have given us the most detailed information on Valdivia burial customs available at present. For example, there is an infant's burial, covered by an overturned pot, a family member buried beneath a house post as a guardian, sentinel, or sacrifice, and a high-status female within a cist formed by ritually broken *metates* (querns) over a floor of *manos* (rounded upper grinding stones) (Marcos 1988 I:40, 162, 164). Real Alto had a plaza with a western burial mound and a men's or fiesta house on the eastern side (*ibid.*:41, 163, 176, 192). Ceremonial bowls decorated with incised or excised bands were recovered from the site (Di Capua 1986). There is evidence for intense cultivation and care was taken to preserve harvest surpluses to eliminate periods of shortages. All of this evidence can be used to reconstruct the social organization and ritual practices of the Valdivia culture.

Valdivia Female Figurines

General Concepts

Interpretations of the ritual functions of Valdivia figurines have remained tentative until now. The eleven figurines recovered from the Charnel House at Real Alto were characterized as offerings (Marcos 1988 I:103). This limited archaeological evidence is an insufficient basis for generalizations applied to the entire *corpus* of Valdivia figurines. The heads of just two figurines have been recovered from the portion of the "Montículo de las Reuniones" (meeting mound or Fiesta House) excavated to date (phase 3 and later). Neither of these was found in the plaza. One of these was discovered at the foot of the ramp leading to the charnel house (*ibid.*:89-104). Damp stresses that at the Valdivia 1 domestic structure at Real Alto studied by him "todas las figurinas, obras de piedra sencilla, en las que frecuentemente se hicieron muescas . . . se encontraban dentro de una estructura de vivienda" (Damp 1988:68).[2] "The vast majority of the figurines comes from a phase III context defined as Structure 1 . . . These fig-

[1] Dates for phases 2-8 are extracted from Marcos (1988 I:73, 78-79) with emendations suggested by James Zeidler (personal communication August, 1993). They were calibrated by Marcos using the curves suggested by Damon *et al.* (1974). Phase 1 dates are derived from Damp (1988), uncalibrated. The sequence has been modified to eliminate a gap of 26 years which would otherwise exist between phases 7 and 8. This gap is assumed to result from the fact that there are very few radiocarbon dates for Valdivia phase 7 and their standard deviations do not overlap with those available for phase 8. Dates for phases 2-7 have been obtained from material recovered in excavations at the Real Alto sites (Liu, Riley, and Coleman 1986:106-107). Phase 8 dates are extrapolated from work at the Ayalán (Guayas) and San Isidro (Manabí) sites. The overall Valdivia sequence stands in need of reevaluation.

[2] "All the plain stone figurines, which frequently are notched, were found within houses." Damp adds that the form of one of these stone figurines (1988:figure 85) "is significantly larger, 6 cm in length and 2.2 cm in width; its shape and size conform to the shëbënantai of Shipibo-Conibo groups of the Peruvian montaña. *Shëbënantais* are phalliform lithic objects are used in the puberty ceremonies of adolescent girls (Damp 1988:68, citing Raymond *et al.* 1975:34, 51, figure 29 b, c).

urines are anything but homogeneous in style . . ." (Lundberg 1977:4).

At Loma Alta figurines were also found associated with domestic refuse that is, in turn, associated with early Valdivia structural features (Scott Raymond, personal communication, May, 1993; Stahl 1986:141). At Real Alto, figurines are also associated with phase 3 domestic refuse (Zeidler 1984:435-443, 487). Our understanding of Valdivia rituals performed on the Charnel House mound are limited to those from phase 2 through phase 4b (Marcos 1988 I:89-101). The range of iconographic variables observed among the eleven figurines recovered from the Charnel House demonstrates that by Valdivia phase 3 the motivations governing the iconography of the various figurines were already operative.

The intense concentration of figurines within habitation areas is overwhelming proof that they functioned in a domestic context,[3] where the rituals in which they may have been used took place. This association has been of the greatest significance in the formation of my interpretation of these figurines. The figurines, once discarded, were broken along with the rest of the garbage, by trampling or by rolling down the slope of the house platform, losing both their physical integrity and their stratigraphic context. Small figurines, with short legs, and without neck or waist, may be found unbroken, because they are less fragile than the large and fine figurines.

It is difficult to sustain the hypothesis that Valdivia figurines were used in curing rituals (Evans, Meggers, and Estrada 1959:10; Meggers 1966:41) performed by a shaman, and broken afterwards, when their purpose had been accomplished. They never represent injuries or the outward manifestations of disease. The fact that they are not found in unoccupied locations apparently used to cultivate plants argues against the idea that Valdivia figurines were associated with rituals related to agriculture (Holm 1987:11). Stahl (1986) takes into account the function of figurines in shamanistic narcotic use in the American tropics at present and suggests that Valdivia figurines served "as repositories for spirits contacted by the shaman during ecstatic visits to hidden domains" (*ibid.*:141) within a domestic context. Certainly it is the association of Valdivian figurines with occupation zones that leads us towards their interpretation. Nevertheless, and above all, it is the iconography of the figurines that can guide us towards a solid explanation of their ritual function. They must not be studied on their own, but as integral to a unified cultural context.

Patricia Rice (1981:402-416), after analyzing many examples of the "Venus" figurines of the upper Palaeolithic, has stated that these represent all the physical aspects of a woman's life. She has come to the conclusion that the Venus figurines result from a desire to express, globally, all the stages of female development from pre-puberty to old age. Rice argues against the idea that these figurines are only symbols of female fertility. Likewise, my examination of Valdivia figurines has led me to the same conclusion. Valdivia statuettes rarely represent pregnancy and maternity, but, in general, either depict immature female bodies or those with the most obvious female attributes.

The hypothesis that figurines with half the head shaved may be related to a girls' puberty ritual is based on iconographic evidence of the depilated head in association with female bodies still without adult contours, without breasts, or with little indication of them, and without arms. Surprisingly, in the wet-tropical communities of South America, the removal of head hair remains a very common aspect of girls' puberty rites. Nevertheless, my thesis is based upon iconographic associations, not on analogy.

In studying Valdivia figurines I have been faced with the difficulty that the majority of these artifacts come from unknown proveniences and are the discoveries of artifact

[3] According to Zeidler ". . . The dispersion data of figurines in the house floor deposits demonstrate a co-occurrence with indicators of major food preparation activities (fixed features such as hearths, burned areas, etc.) and ceramic use and storage, both of which are assumed to be associated with females. The importance of figurines in this regard lies in their strong gender association with females, and in their independence from these other indicators in a different (superstructural) domain of social reality" (1984:443).

hunters (*huaqueros*). To add to the problems of scholarly analysis, studies of Valdivia figurines are inaccessible, or inadequately illustrated and do not usually provide quantitative information. Mariella Manrique's thesis on Valdivia figurines from Real Alto has not been published. Although a copy is on file at the Escuela Politécnica del Litoral (ESPOL) in Guayaquil, Ecuador, I have not had access to it. Neither the circulated version of Lundberg's work (1977), nor that of Norton (1982 [1971]) is accompanied by illustrations. The material analyzed by Lubensky comes from unknown proveniences (Lubensky 1991). Nevertheless, the characteristics of the 15 figurines from Real Alto, published by Marcos (1988 I:91-104), are iconographically diverse and share traits with examples I have studied. Parallels with material from secure stratigraphic contexts confirms the authenticity of unprovenienced figurines. These parallels also support the argument that there are systematic recurrences within the *corpus* of Valdivia figurines of their defining characteristics.

Those that show head depilation correspond to the developmental stages of pre-puberty (Figures 3, 13, 19-22), puberty (Figures 4, 14, 23-27), and adolescence (Figures 5, 28-31). The smooth, or depilated area is more extensive in the first and second stages and less, and most subtle, in the third one. The persistence of this iconographic trait in these consecutive phases does not correspond to style or adornment, but is an unquestionable indicator of a ritual act performed in Valdivia.

Valdivia Female Figurines in Stone

The earliest Valdivia figurines were executed in stone. In their schematic designs, they don't exhibit the characteristics mentioned above. Nevertheless, it is indisputable that they represent female beings and because of their chronological position, they must be considered.

The first figurines were flat, rectangular, and trimmed from smooth pebbles. On one of the smaller faces three grooves were made to indicate eyes and a mouth. On the opposite site, an incision in the form of an upside-down V was used to mark the female crotch (Figure 6). Thus, in Valdivia phase 1, female symbolism is clearly suggested.

Inland from the Palmar Inlet on the north portion of the Santa Elena Peninsula, stratigraphic excavations have been made at the site of la Clementina (Patricio Moncayo, personal communication, February, 1992). There, at the same depth, figurines made from ellipsoid pebbles were found along with rectangular ones. In order to represent the human body realistically, and to avoid the plastic limitations of slabs, a cylindroid form was used. This was widest at the center and tapered at each end and provided a better alternative for the realistic representation of the human female's curved body (Figure 7).

At one end of the pebble is the head, with incised eyes and mouth. The line of the arms descends laterally towards the belly, the widest portion of the shape. The profile of the breasts is integral to the female appearance of these statuettes. At one end the central notch remains, in the shape of an upside-down V, as the image of the vulva. The head illustrated in Figure 49 was recovered from the 0.80 to 1.00 meter level of the site. Its characteristics are important to my thesis and I analyze them below. In contrast with the flat and smooth type, the second type persists until phase 6 (Zevallos M. and Holm 1960:plate 20), demonstrating that its symbolism or its special function remained valid a millennium after its prototype was made. I consider the notch found on both rectangular and cylindroid examples to be a unique symbol of the female sex and I disagree with those who assign a sexually ambiguous value to these figurines (Lathrap, Collier, and Chandra 1975:39; Marcos 1988 II:318).

Another type of stone figurine is defined as "Palmar Incised" (Meggers, Evans, and Estrada 1965:96, plate 118 a-j). Distinctive features of this type include the consistent absence of any breast or hair details, and large hands executed in low relief (Figures 8-11). In my opinion, these represent males and should be studied separately.[4]

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[4] Detailed information from Moncayo's excavation is as follows: From four test pits, at depths between 1.00 and 1.20 meters, 8 rectangular figurines were discovered. No ellipsoidal examples were found.

Ceramic Female Figurines

By Valdivia phase 2 ceramic female figurines were being made (Marcos 1988 I:91) with realistic contours of the female body formed in the clay (Figure 12). The head, neck, and torso with breasts were shaped by joining two pieces of clay. The body tapers at the height of the waist and later it was elongated at the pubic region. At the rounded buttocks, the two pieces of clay separate to form legs, larger at the top and narrowing at their ends, without any indication of feet. A layer of clay adheres to the head, forming the hair. Usually, a reddish slip covers the entire body.

Phase 3 marks the apex of Valdivia figurines, although they were made until the end of phase 6. Substyles developed at various sites, and these substyles are known by the site names. However, certain traits are shared, and these are the symbolic and functional ones. There were very few figurines made during phase 7/8, and these lack the characteristics of the earlier ones. Of ordinary quality and ungraceful in execution, late figurines almost always represent pregnant women sitting down. The head is covered with a helmet. The reduction in quantity and attributes is a clear indication of a change in behavior also evident in the iconography of Valdivia vessels from San Isidro.

Figurines and their Iconographic Variants

The archaeological evidence cited above has not yielded sufficient data to permit a precise judgment on the function of the female figurines. An analysis of their iconography is the only method useful for interpreting the purpose for which they were made. Two different elements affect each Valdivia figurine. One is style and the other is the message expressed through symbolism. By style I mean the manner of representing details such as eyes, nose, or body parts, through relief or incision, as well as the manner of forming the mass of the head and the modeling of the body. A characteristic of style is the repetition of a given morphology. Iconography that expresses a message is an aspect of style, but not all stylistic elements are aspects of symbolism. Both style and symbolism conform to an internal logic that unites traits falling within each category.

From the point of view of iconography, variables follow rules that, through systematic repetition in so many examples, appear to reflect precise intentions. Therefore, the analysis of iconographic details and their interrelations can help us to arrive at an understanding of significance and, eventually, the motivation behind these statuettes. The majority of Valdivia figurines that I have analyzed do not show, because of their poor state of preservation, all the elements necessary and sufficient to validate my claims. Nevertheless, combinations of details taken together reinforce my arguments.

There is an obvious interdependence of variables relating to arms and breasts, with those of hairdo and pubic region. The regular repetition of certain combinations was apparently directed by a logic that could guide me towards a comprehension of the significance of these images and towards their interpretation. The fact of reiteration and the interrelationship of these traits, in hundreds of figurines, proved useful, decisive, and revealing in ordering each complex into five consecutive semantic categories with the last ones being the logical result of the iconographic discourse of the first. These concomitants are not accidental, but are subordinate to a meaning. In forming these categories I have not included the cylindroid figurines. Their function could have been different. The dominant theme is the human female in her various stages of physical development from "pre-nubility" (Holm 1987:11) to pregnancy. There are rare examples representing a woman giving birth or carrying her baby.

"Pre-puberty" stage. Under the definition of "pre-puberty" I have placed figurines (Figures 18-20) that represent a girl at the

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Another pair of pits produced a total of 4 rectangular and 6 ellipsoidal figurines. At a depth of 1.00 meters 1 rectangular figurine and 1 ellipsoidal one appeared. At a higher level the rectangular ones disappeared, but 19 ellipsoidal figurines were recovered. Depths of between 1.00 and 0.80 meters produced 5 incised palmar figurines. This makes a total of 13 rectangular, 26 ellipsoidal and 5 Palmar Incised figurines.

beginning of puberty. Relevant details include a straight trunk with no evident waist continuing to the top of the legs. There are no breasts or arms indicated. Half of the head is depilated. There is a protuberance in the pubic area. These characteristics are shared with the figurine (Figure 16) described by Marcos (1988 II:327) as male. Nevertheless, one has a girl's body here, in the stage of pre-puberty as indicated by a detail that, in my opinion, marks the representation as female. This is the *mons veneris* more evident on the flat, slender bodies of prepubescent girls. Lubensky (1991:27) has provided decisive arguments against an interpretation of the protuberance as the masculine sexual organs, and, in so doing, has made a positive contribution to my thesis.

The detail of the smooth half of the head appears on this example, and on many more. Marcos (1988 I:96-97) has published the figurine, recovered from the Real Alto Charnel House in which the depilation is realistically represented by tiny punctate marks similar to those left on the scalp after hair has been pulled out with its roots, or the splotches on the skin after hair has been shaved (Figure 22). This iconography contrasts with that of the other half of the head where hair is indicated by long incisions.

Puberty stage. Under the definition of puberty I include those figurines that represent a girl in this developmental stage, signaled by the presence of small breasts. A prominent bulge, straight and sharp, replaces the arms (Figures 23-25). The iconography of the pubic protuberance continues, as well as partial depilation of the head. This smooth area can be either the right side or the left, without obvious reason. On the example from phase 4b (Figure 21; Marcos 1988 I:101), the important characteristic of small breasts appears and depilation relates to this physiological stage. The relationship between the iconography of the arms as unformed buds breaking away from the shoulders and that of the breasts, whose relief is more perceptible to the fingers than to the eyes, marks a milestone on the physiological trajectory of this young, budding woman. The bodies of those figurines whose headdress is a round helmet, or hood, according to Hill (1975:10), have the same characteristics as others assigned to the puberty stage. The breasts are very small and two little bulges stand for arms (Figure 27). Although depilation is not represented, a convex sheet, similar to a hood, shadows the forehead with its projecting front and seems to convey the anguish of someone with a veiled face. The smoothness and reddish slip of the figurine's head could have been intended as a way of indicating the absence of hair, instead of depilation. This iconography is repeated on examples from different sites and is linked to puberty.

Adolescence stage. Under the definition of adolescence (Figures 5, 15, 28-31) I have grouped female figurines with developed bodies, very evident breasts, and arms depicted in relief. There is no longer a lower protuberance. The head depilation remains, not yet total, but is limited to sections whose form, repeated in many examples, appears to follow pre-established patterns such as deep furrows, narrow or wide, horizontal or vertical, meanders, or wide areas bordered with hair. On the figurines following within the "pre-puberty", "puberty", and "adolescence", one sees the female body in the stages of development described as "prenubility" by Holm (1987:11).

Having identified their iconographic sequence, I believe I have discovered that these images could have had a connection with the observance of a ritual in which depilation was the most important act. The length of the hair, that had begun to grow back, could have served as a marker indicating that the adolescent girl was sexually mature. In a ceremony closing a girl's puberty ritual, part of her hair could have been cut or depilated once again, to express a new concept. Three figurine categories correspond to three milestones in a physiological process, and three stages in a postulated puberty ritual dedicated initially to the protection, and later to the integration of a female in the social content of her group.

Adult stage. The inclusion of a short analysis of figurines representing the adult stage and pregnancy is not a digression in this paper, dedicated to the analysis of Valdivia figurines related to puberty rituals, but

is indispensable to emphasize that the iconography of the hairdo, headgear, arms, and pubis is always significant in the depiction of the human female, from before puberty to adulthood.

I have assigned to the "adult" stage figurines with well-developed breasts and modeled arms forming an arch towards the front. Hair is indicated in the pubic area. The head exhibits thick hair (Figures 16, 32-37) without any trace of depilation. The incisions could indicate the strands of flowing hair. However, in many other cases, the incisions follow precise patterns. The most common is a herringbone-patterned hairdo in the front and back parts of the head (Figure 33). Other examples repeat the pattern of parallel rows of zig-zag lines (Figure 12). The most complicated is the arrangement of locks in quadrangles, finished with incised parallel diagonal lines, with the lines of each block running in a direction opposite those of the adjacent block (Figures 16, 38-40). These figurines are images of woman in the flower of youth, ready for procreation.

Figurines within the "adult" category exhibit traits lacking in the figurines pertaining to earlier stages of life. These features include breasts, arms, a delineated pubic region, and head hair. Some adult figurines are, additionally, differentiated by a perforation that runs horizontally between the neck and the bun at the back of the head. This hole is never found in figurines pertaining to the pre-puberty and puberty stages. The purpose of the perforation was to make the figurine into a pendant and it could have functioned as an amulet used in acts of sympathetic magic (Figures 36, 37).

Pregnancy stage. I have assigned figurines of pregnant women to the pregnancy stage. In these, obvious breasts are combined with swollen bellies. The lower arms, extended below the belly, seem to support the weight of the fetus. The figurines of pregnant women, like those assigned to other categories, have a significant function. The heads of these images are covered by a smooth, or, sometimes, a decorated, bonnet. The iconography of covered hair, consistently associated with extended arms, is only found on figurines of pregnant women. This exclusive association continues with similar Valdivia 8 figurines from the site of San Isidro. I think that it signifies the proximity of birth (Figures 43-45).

On the helmets of the complete examples (Figures 43, 44), there are long and deep incisions, symmetrically distributed around the face, along the length of the headdress, and on the back, a pattern also repeated on the headdress of a figurine head from Real Alto (Figure 46, Marcos and Manrique 1988:51, figure 4a). The top and middle of the headdresses of the two complete figurines (Figures 43, 44) and the head from Real Alto are hollow, forming a tiny receptacle. Marcos and Manrique (1988:43), who have published and commented on this figurine fragment, point out that the pattern of the incisions on the hood of this head resembles the pelage markings on a wild cat. I agree with this interpretation. Nevertheless, the symbolic value, in relation to the other iconographic elements remains a matter for speculation.

According to Marcos and Manrique (1988), the head was once part of a figurine representing a male shaman, whose avatar was the jaguar. The similarity between the headdress design of the Real Alto fragment and those of the two complete figurines which are unequivocal images of pregnant women is a valid argument against the assertion that the fragment represents a figurine of a male shaman. Besides their function as inhalers for hallucinogenic snuff (snuff tablets), some figurines of pregnant women are pendants and rattles (Figure 47).

Very few examples of figurines of pregnant women are in museum collections or were found during scientific excavation (Evans, Meggers, and Estrada 1959:10; Lundberg 1977), and we can assume that they were rarely produced. They could have had a practical function for exceptional and specific cases. They were not part of routine rituals, as the others were.

A very small figurine of a pregnant woman, on her knees, with her arms raised, and her hands in fists (Figure 42), as if grabbing hold of something, can be considered a variant of this type. The top of the

head is flattened as with some examples of pregnancy, a peculiarity that, because of its reduced size, could not have had a functional purpose. The iconography of this figurines fits into the logical sequence of the examples analyzed. The little figure is valuable because it reproduces one of the traditional postures used to give birth in the American humid tropics.

The Figurines and their Chronology

The iconographic data, according to which it is possible to differentiate figurines and assign them to the five categories of pre-puberty, puberty, adolescence, adulthood, and pregnancy, would not be sufficient without a consideration of figurine chronology, verified by controlled excavations.

The dates of the figurines included in my analysis, whose variables form the iconographic progression relating to the development of female sexuality, all belong to the same temporal span, Valdivia 1 to Valdivia 6, with the largest incidence in phase 3. This temporal configuration tends to support the thesis that all were encompassed within the same concept of ritual.

The chronological data (Figure 2) establishes the trajectory of the figurines across the eight phases. The stone figurines, with female attributes, produced from ellipsoid pebbles, persisted according to Lundberg (1977) from Valdivia phase 1 to Valdivia 5, and probably into Valdivia 6 (Zevallos and Holm 1960:plate 20).

The majority of ceramic figurines belong to phase 3, and the context in which they are most frequently found is domestic areas. The presence in the Real Alto Charnel House of figurines with different characteristics, including those relating to depilation, proves that between phase 2 and phase 4 the modalities of each group were already established. The details of the depilation of a Valdivia 1 stone figurine (Figure 49; Moncayo, personal communication 1992) display the early manifestation of this tradition that lasted until Valdivia 6 at the San Pablo Site. Adult figurines from phase 2 have the "herringbone" hairdo, a trait assumed to have ritual value.

We can deduce, therefore, that in the Valdivia culture, for about twelve hundred years, the stages of pre-puberty, puberty, and adolescence were ritually marked by rather extensive depilation, and that the adult stage was indicated by special hairstyles. Pregnant women are rarely represented, and when they are, their heads are covered by a helmet. I suggest that the heads with bonnets imitating feline pelage patterns, which functioned as snuff inhalers, may have been part of the imagery of pregnancy. I deduce that the relationship between this iconography and the feline headdress continued until phase 6 at the San Pablo site (Zevallos and Holm 1960:plate 18). In various museum collections one finds heads without bodies, whose feline headdress, similar to those of the two intact figurines of pregnant women, has the central well that is a characteristic unique to this particular iconography.

There is little information on figurines assigned to phases 7 and 8. In phase 8 there is no iconography of depilation. The most common figurines are those of pregnant females with bonnets, but without feline symbolism and without the hollows that make them into snuff inhalers. These observations lead me to suppose that the ritual act of head depilation that the figurine iconography replicates was already obsolete before the final phase of Valdivia. On the figurines of the Machalilla culture datable to between 3100 and 2700 years before present (Lippi 1983:354), the indications of head depilation are no longer observed. On Machalilla figurines, multiple perforations of the edges of the ears are evident, a characteristic they have in common with the figurines of later Ecuadorian cultures. This physical mutilation, in substitution for depilation, could have signaled puberty or some other transition to new status. Up to the present, various cultures of the Amazon drainage perforate the ear lobes or the nasal septum to mark puberty. The Tsachila (Colorados) insert a wooden stick into one side of the nose of adolescents, and a silver one into the noses of the newly married (Rivet 1905:189).

From the chronological data one deduces that the cultural trait of depilation began,

flourished, and died out before the cultural changes of Valdivia 7-8.

In the course of this analysis I have defined those characteristics that, inherent in a given category of figurines, distinguish them from other categories because of their exclusivity. The human female, in her various physiological phases from the shapelessness and transitionality of early puberty to the deformation of pregnancy, was the model for the figurines.

The headdress theme is of overwhelming importance and is common to all except the figurines of pregnant women whose hair is represented as covered, and demonstrates the importance of the iconography of hair. My five categories have revealed that the hairdo was a significant mark of the stages in the life of a Valdivian woman. Consequently, I assume that these figurines had specific functions in the ritual life of the Valdivia culture.

We can never know what, for the Valdivians, was the precise significance of the rare iconography of the bulge in the pubic region. It is indisputable that figurines with depilation and pubic bulges can be assigned to the first and second figurine categories and are themselves related to the single variable of the lack of breasts in the first category and the outlines of developing breasts in the second category. At the same time, depilation is also found on the images of developed female bodies assignable to the third category. Indications of depilation are less evident on images of developed bodies than on those of prepubescent girls. The size of the areas of depilation have an inverse relationship to that of the breasts and arms, and as depilated areas are reduced, the rare pubic protuberances disappear. The first three categories have depilation in common, and it is the most significant trait. It is this link between the figurines of the first three consecutive categories that marks them as female. I believe that the uninterrupted presence of depilation is a valid, logical argument against the idea that the figurines with the pubic swelling represent male individuals.

The congruent and methodological incidence and coincidence of variables has allowed me to clarify their iconographical manifestations. Through separating them and regrouping them I have revealed the logic that unites them and its possible significance within the Valdivian social context. The interpretation of the symbolic messages enmeshed within the iconography of each precolumbian artifact can only be intuitive and tentative. Thousands of years separate us from these cultures, making it impossible to fill in blanks with first-hand information. In this article I have only presented iconographic evidence, observable on Valdivian figurines, to suggest that most or all of these had a definite function in representing the various stages of female sexual development from that of the immature girl, represented without arms, and with her head hair removed. It is now necessary to attempt an analysis of the symbolic meaning of depilation, and to attempt ethnographic comparisons.

Valdivia Female Figurines and their Symbolism

Archaeological data are insufficient to reconstruct what went on in Valdivia society, or what inspired its iconography. I must, therefore, follow other paths in order to prove my hypothesis that girls' puberty rituals were observed in Valdivian society and that the figurines were related to them. Although it may be possible to criticize my ideas as baseless, they can, at least, guide future archaeologists who might have more sophisticated means at their disposal to use in developing a deeper understanding of cultures as old as that of Valdivia.

The arguments I have previously set out, and those I am about to suggest, are of very different natures. The first, most objective, are based upon tangible data such as iconography. The rest, references to symbolism or to ethnographic comparisons, enter the field of speculation, where proof is difficult. These arguments are, nevertheless, suggestive and worthy of consideration, but I hope that in setting them up I do not cause the collapse of the strong evidence I have outlined in the careful iconographic analysis of many Valdivia figurines.

The marking of the stages of human physical development with ritual is a cultural universal. In the majority of cases, a part of

the body is symbolically manipulated. The existence of a class of symbolic body codes is well-documented for the cultures of tropical America. The members of these societies use their own bodies as a matrix, cutting their hair, piercing their ears or noses, to signal the life stages of the human being.

Although, paradoxically, it is certain that "the body is capable of furnishing a natural system of symbols, but our problem is to identify the elements in the social dimension which are reflected in one view and in other of how the body should function . . ." (Douglas 1970:12). "According to [one system of natural symbols], the body will tend to be conceived as an organ of communication" (*ibid.*:16). Our body and our gestures make up part of a traditional, non-verbal communication system. There are multiple channels of communication that together make up a coherent message. Body paint, clothing, features, and hairdressing are all part of this type of discourse. Haircuts are not an archetype, but they do respond to the need to bring about a transformation by manipulating the body in some way to signal a physiological change through a rite of passage and to differentiate the status of those in a particular stage *vis à vis* all others. The specific manipulation is important for significance it has in the symbolic value system of the group and its culture.

In the previous section I demonstrated that the icons of the Valdivia figurines relate to a precise intention, that of representing the consecutive stages of female physical development. In turning towards what is universal in the crisis of development, and by focusing iconography through a different lens, I hope to reveal the significance that underlies form, moving towards the realm of speculation.

Girls usually live through the various stages of development within the confines of their houses, under the eyes of mothers, grandmothers, and aunts who watch them, praising and educating them. This observation becomes an aspect of ritual, independent of material manifestations and of the group in which it takes place. When a girl experiences her first menstruation she is no longer a child, but she is not yet a woman.

> "Danger lies in transitional states, simply because transition is neither one state nor the next, it is undefinable. The person who must pass from one to another is himself in danger and emanates danger to others. The danger is controlled by ritual which precisely separates him from his old status, segregates him for a time and then publicly declares his entry to his new status. Not only is transition itself dangerous, but also the rituals of segregation are the most dangerous phase of the rites . . . But we can be sure that the trumped up dangers express something important about marginality" (Douglas 1978:96).

Douglas's words fit a girl's transition from the time of her first menstruation, between pre-puberty and puberty, a state which, being undefinable, changes the girl into a fragile being, within a sphere beset with dangers that are threatening her.

Depilation, Breasts, and Arms

The truth of Douglas's theories seems to be confirmed by the figurines with depilation that are exclusive to Valdivia. Whoever sees them perceives the impact, direct and immediate, of a warning, of a certain limitation. "It seems that if a person has no place in the social system and is therefore a marginal being, all precautions against danger must come from others" (Douglas 1978:97).

The unusual aspect of Valdivia heads acts as a signal imposing differentiation. The theoretical concept of marginality is expressed in sculpture, emitting a clear message from across the barrier of time. The anomaly of the lack of arms in the prepubescent images (Figures 3, 13, 18-26), through repetition in so many examples, emerges as an iconographic canon in semantic relationship with the near-absence of breasts and the immature aspect of these human bodies. The realistic detail of arms is omitted to express symbolically the physical and mental immaturity of the girl. She, during puberty, is in a physiologically and temperamentally ambiguous and marginal situation that prevents her from using her arms and working efficiently.

Sculpturally, one has thus achieved a great coherence of signifiers.

Symbolism of the Figurines with "Hoods"

Assignable to the category of "puberty", because of the smallness of the breasts and the lack of arms, certain figures exhibit, instead of depilation, a hemispherical smooth hood brought forward over the forehead, and whose shadow hides the upper part of the face (Figure 27). This rigid ceramic sheet may have been meant to imitate the appearance of hair stiffened with ground *achiote* (*Bixa orellana*), replacing depilation or a gauze veiling the head. We see here a being who neither can, nor may look at her surroundings, another symbol of her "marginal condition" (Douglas 1978:97), analogous with the particularities of the other figurines in this group.

A radical iconographic change occurs with the images of adolescents. Arms appear in relief below very obvious breasts (Figures 5, 15, 29-31). Forms transmit the message that marginality has been superseded. The female body has acquired the distinctive characteristics of its sex. The arms appear here as a symbol of the young woman's capacity for work. The lower and depilated areas, in contrast with the representations of earlier stages of the life cycle, decorate the head, demonstrating the culmination of a physiological process.

The gradual transformations in the representations of the breasts, the arms, and the differences in form and size of areas of depilation that one observes among the three categories of figurines reveal, in my opinion, the diacronicity of a sequence, leaving us to imagine how and when the acts of depilation occurred within the puberty rituals of Valdivia. We can use ethnographic data to support this opinion.

Breasts, Arms, and Hairstyle of Adults

In contrast with the iconography I have described for the stages of pre-puberty, puberty, and adolescence, figurines with full busts, well-modeled arms, and long, thick hair are representations of the adult woman. The position of the arms around the breasts expresses the pride of a being conscious of having arrived at physical and psychological maturity. There are no intentional alterations to these perfect female bodies. At times the long, heavy hair, characteristic of an adult, is arranged in geometric patterns (Meggers, Evans, and Estrada 1965:plate 120 c, d). These are repeatedly encountered and, in my judgment, are a sign of a particular status. The modification of the appearance of girls and boys with hairstyles, crowns, necklaces, bracelets, and face and body painting when they form a new family is almost a universal cultural trait.

Other figurines of adolescents, with breasts already evident, may have asymmetric arm positions. One hand raised to the chin expresses silence (Figure 50). One arm near a breast and the other near the pubis expresses modesty (Figure 51). These representations confirm that rule that, through presence or absence, arms express symbolic messages.

Arms and Headdress of Pregnant Women

On the figurines of pregnant women, where the breasts meet the swelling of the belly, the arms are extended towards the bottom of the belly, supporting its weight and symbolizing protection. The headdress that hides the hair of expectant mothers has multiple incisions in many cases, as we have seen above. This carries feline symbolism, and is a garment that may have been part of magical curing rituals, a suggestion that is compatible with the triple functions of many of these figurines as snuff inhalers, pendants, and rattles. The noise of the rattle, symbol of life, and the swinging of a pendant in synchrony with uterine contractions may have been symbolically linked in magical practices considered efficacious for a successful birth. Of course, these are speculative interpretations. In the belief systems of the cultures of the South American lowlands, the jaguar is identified with the magical power of the shaman and linked with concepts of fertility (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971:77-79, 98, 100, 106-108, 129, 132-133, 175, 212, 250-251, 265).

Figurines of pregnant women with the head covered by a helmet last until Valdivia

phase 7/8, leading one to suppose that the symbolic and magical value of this garment was still current in the final phases of Valdivia.

The Pubis and its Symbolism

On all continents, in all periods, and in all locations, the image of the vulva is the symbol of the primary female processes and functions. The universal symbol of the sex, a straight or wedge-shaped furrow, appears on one of the short sides of the Valdivian flat lithic figurines, a formula that persists at the end of the form of the ellipsoid stones. Shattering the limitations of the stones, that induce abstraction, ceramics facilitate the representation of realistic details that remain faithful to the motivations that governed the working of the stones, but involve all the facets of the theme of female sexuality, realistic as well as symbolic.

In the images assignable to the stages of pre-puberty and puberty, a protuberance at the base of the belly, disassociated from any realism, has perplexed interpreters. Because it is so imprecise, it is not relatable to any anatomical detail. Perhaps it represents the convexity of the pubic triangle evident in immature young girls. Just as these figurines are unrealistic because of their lack of arms, the bulges may have symbolized the newly shed menstrual blood, or the reproductive potential of the adolescent, suggested by her first menstruation.

The depiction of the pubis is precise in the figurines representing adolescents and adults. Sometimes multiple punctations simulate pubic hair. Every detail is subordinate to the symbolic logic of the progression of physical development.

The absence of any depiction of the vulva in the figurines depicting pregnant women does not appear to have a symbolic value. One can attribute it, like the lack of breasts, to the impossibility of showing these parts on the convexity of the belly, hollow, in the majority of cases. Pregnancy itself is the principal symbol in this iconography.

Symbolism of the Color Red

The detail of the smooth red slip of the headdress of Valdivia figurines necessitates some comments. The detail of the "shaved side of the head" and its red color has already been noted by Evans, Meggers, and Estrada (1959:11). Zevallos and Holm (1960:70) refer to some [female] figurines from the site of San Pablo that are painted red and others that are rubbed with mineral pigments.[5] Here I must observe that the bright red slip does not always appear on the ordinary or small Valdivia figurines.

Located over the shoulder, elbow, pelvis, and knee joints of a female skeleton of a person of rank buried within the Real Alto Charnel House were found well-polished and rounded red stones from seven to nine millimeters in diameter (Marcos 1988 I:164).

Karen Stothert mentions that in preceramic burials at the Las Vegas site on the Santa Elena Peninsula there were vestiges of red pigment associated with the bones of a female and that a piece of red ocher was within the buccal cavity of another female skeleton (Stothert 1988:139, 142-figure 6.10, 143). Although about 1,500 years separate the two cultures that occupied the same area, according to Stothert they followed one another without a discontinuity (*ibid.*:259-260). It is probable that the ideological association of red with the female sex in the Las Vegas preceramic burials remained current in the Valdivia culture, as seen in the red stones associated with the skeleton of a woman in the Charnel House of Real Alto. A connection may also have existed between the femininity of the figurines and the red color of the depilated portions of their heads, of the partings that cut through their hair, of the hoods, and of the slip that covers the body of the best-made figurines. Because of all these

[5] The figurine published by Marcos and whose headdress is defined by him as a hood, is different from those that I have assigned to the puberty group for the following reasons: In this example breasts are evident. The form of the headdress is rectangular and not spherical (see Figure 16). Its finish is striated, "rough to the touch". From this I deduce that this figurine lacks the red slip and does not fall into the category of figurines with hoods.

arguments, I think it is acceptable to propose that the color red may have been one of the significant indications of the femininity of the Valdivia figurines. Ethnographic evidence from South America suggests that the coloring of a girl's body with red paint or pigment is a significant act within puberty rituals. However, this evidence, temporally remote from the Valdivian practices, can only confirm that it is part of human nature to attribute symbolic value to colors according to their natural attributes. Almost universally, human beings associate red with life. Therefore, the Valdivia culture could have associated magical properties with this color, as the archaeological evidence suggests.

My tentative interpretation of the figurines, within each category, and as functioning parts of a whole configuration, supports my hypothesis that the majority of Valdivian figurines are the iconographic reflection of ritual behavior that sanctioned, within a domestic context, the stages of maturity of the female body, up to adulthood. Although we can never know for certain the symbolic implications of head depilation, I have interpreted depilation as a sign of separation, during puberty, of the girls who are temperamentally marginalized within their society. I have looked for an explanation, in symbolic terms, for the iconographic variables of the arms and the pubic region. I have also demonstrated that the figurines of adult women express concepts not associated with puberty rituals. The uncommon figurines of pregnant women symbolically express protection with the disposition of their arms and are conceptually independent of all other Valdivia figurines.

Although the work of Gutierre Tibón (1972-73:137-146) on Tlatilco figurines has motivated me to undertake this study, and although ethnographic reports on girls' puberty rituals of the American tropics served at the beginning to orient me towards a comprehension of archaeological modalities, I have avoided using the comparative method as a logical foundation for my hypothesis. I think that it is supported adequately by the iconographic elements at my disposal. Nevertheless, it is useful to examine the theme of girls' puberty rituals still current in tropical America. Analogies to be found between their modalities and Valdivian iconography certainly do not contradict my hypothesis.

Puberty Rituals Described in Ethnohistorical and Ethnographic Sources Compared with the Valdivian Ritual

Ethnographic data from South America can be of indirect use in penetrating the personal experiences of members of extinct lowland societies such as Valdivia. The discovery of some correlations between the characteristics of figurines in the pre-puberty, puberty, adolescence, and adult categories with ethnographic reality served to orient me in my reading of purely iconographic codes. Nevertheless, possible analogies cannot be verified by material or scientific data. Neither can such analogies serve as the basis for diffusionist or ecological determinist theories, because one cannot assume transcultural contacts stretching from remote time to the present. The only valid premise is that human beings, because of their essential nature, will react in analogous manners to similar situations.

The inhabitants of the drainages of the large South American river systems usually mark the basic stages in the life cycle of individuals and of the community with rituals. Among these are girls' puberty ceremonies in which communities, remote from each other, follow similar norms in their conduct and coordination. All of them hold the common belief that the impurity of the menstruating woman is a threat to the equilibrium of their society. Because she is linked with grave dangers, the young girl must carry the sign and symbol of her precarious state, changing her external aspect with a hair cut or depilation. In all Amazonian communities, the life of girls develops in the maternal orbit and the life of boys centers around their father, far from the village, in the jungle.

The segregation of the young person within the domestic space, with speech prohibited, forbidden to look around, or to be seen, and under dietary taboos, is a series of rules observed in the large majority of Amazonian cultures. The symbolic interpretation of impurity (Douglas 1978) in which the girl is submerged at the beginning of her puberty

clarifies the significance of these taboos. The girl must accept the obligation to perform the heavy manual labor assigned to women to temper her body and spirit and to prepare herself for her future roles as wife and mother.

Space does not permit me to refer to the puberty rituals of all the tropical forest communities. A good deal of relevant information has not been described exhaustively nor to uniform scientific standards. I will refer, therefore, only to Cuna ritual (Holmer and Wassén 1963), to that of the Desana (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971), and that of the Tukuna (Nimuendajú 1952), because these have been described in relationship to indigenous cosmologies.

Cuna Puberty Ritual

The Cuna occupy the island of San Blas and the Atlantic coast of southern Panama. In 1637 Father Adrián de Santo Thomás witnessed a Cuna female puberty ceremony (Santo Thomás 1908[1640]:131, cited by Holmer and Wassén 1963:71). His seventeenth century, first-hand description is valuable for its detailed observations, as well as for its early date. Father Adrián relates that when a "girl has her first period . . ., her sponsor cuts off her hair with a razor". The girl doesn't appear in public until her hair has grown back, at which time her group celebrates the event. When her hair "reaches her waist" the girl is pampered and is the object of flirtation because of her new beauty. She has the chance to meet young, marriageable men and to engage in her first romantic encounters. Later, her godmother and godfather undress her, wash her, "cut her hair in bangs and paint her with 'vija colorada'"[6] above the waist. Later they place the cut hair "in an appropriate place".[7] "At this point her parents seek a husband for her" (*ibid.*).

In the time between the first, complete haircut and the second trimming, a young female's hair grew "down to her waist", the time necessary for her to be transformed from a girl to a woman. The rate of hair growth established the practical and symbolic limits of the waiting period during which the young female became physiologically ready for married life. At the end of the seventeenth century, another source (Lionel Wafer cited in Holmer and Wassén 1963:71) related that "the girls immediately cover their faces with a piece of cotton used as a veil" if someone comes to the place where they are confined, thus preventing them from seeing and being seen.

With the passage of time, these practices changed and hair was cut only off half the head in the first part of the ritual and completely in the other (Nordenskiöld 1938:57; Torres de Ianello 1956:289-296; cited in Holmer and Wassén 1963:70-73). When the young woman is ready for marriage, women, specially designated, crop her hair, and on that occasion her father, to show his social position, offers a great feast, directed by the *Kantule*, a type of shaman. The musical instruments used have to be new. The traditional "Song of the Scissors" (Tisla-Ikala) is sung (Holmer and Wassén 1963:86-147). Emphasis is placed upon the theme of the woman who holds out the hair, those who braid it, those who curl it, and those who cut it (verses 332-576) as well as upon their interactions with insects and birds. These repeated invocations have an archaic resonance.

The ritual, through the epic and mythological aspects of the song that accompanies it, appears to have antique roots. While drawing "scissors", an informant explained the symbolic nomenclature of this instrument's parts to Holmer and Wassén (1963:83). The symbolism is of a sexual character.

In spite of certain variables like the cutting instrument, a razor four centuries ago and scissors today, the norms of the Cuna puberty ritual and the traditional song remained until the middle of the twentieth century, confirming that in the Cuna culture the physical development of the young woman had been very important, in view of the formation of a new nuclear family.

The repetition of the act of cutting, in connection with the growth of the girl, has a surprising iconographic resonance in depilated Valdivia figurines and in their gradual

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[6] *Bixa orellana* [?] [translator].

[7] "en parte decente" [original].

formation of feminine curves. The insistence with which the manipulations of hair are mentioned reveals the sacred nature of these acts, allowing us to think that the hairstyles of Valdivia figurines may have had an analogous significance, unknown to us.

Desana Puberty Ritual

The Desana are located on the equator on the banks of the Vaupés River, an Amazonian tributary. "When a girl has her first menstruation, the sib prepares for an important ceremony during which the young girl will be incorporated into the group as a marriageable woman" (Reichel Dolmatoff 1971:143). During her female puberty ritual a girl is put into seclusion within a small cubicle with walls of matting, on the left side of the main door to the interior of the *maloca* or communal house, for as long as her menstruation lasts. Ashes are strewn on the floor to symbolize the state of the world after the Great World Fire, a reminder of the rules of exogamy. The girl can only eat certain ritually pure small fish and must completely abstain from drinking. She has to ply *cumare* palm fibers. Three times a day the *payé*, a person invested with magical and spiritual powers, blows tobacco smoke over her. He cuts off locks of the girl's hair, throws them into the river, and paints her face and body with red and black colors, to symbolize positive and negative energy.

When menstruation ceases, the girl leaves her cubicle and bathes in the river. When she returns to the *maloca* the *payé* begins prayers, blowing smoke on the trail between the *maloca* and the river landing. At the landing his invocations are similar to those he makes during the initiation of boys. When the girl and the *payé* return, there are ritual greetings, the recitation of myths and genealogies, and an exhortation to maintain cultural norms. The father of the girl responds to the *payé*, thus affirming kinship and alliance.

A dance with *chicha* (fermented beverage) follows and on this occasion the girl often gets to know someone with whom she will later form her family. The parents of both the boy and the girl begin negotiations over the number of canoes, baskets, or fish that the girls' parents will receive in exchange for her (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971:143-144). From Reichel's report it is clear that the girls' puberty ritual is not an end it itself. Through its modalities it moves towards a social goal, that of preserving marriage rules. In both cases, the participation of a person with religious attributes, the *kantule* of the Cuna and the *payé* of the Desana, validates the solemnity of these occasions.

Tukuna Puberty Ritual

Tukuna territory centers along the Amazon-Solimoe and their tributaries from 71° 15' to 68° 40' W and north of 4° south latitude. The Tukuna preserved complete girls' puberty rituals until the middle of this century (Nimuendajú 1952:73-92). In these rituals haircutting fulfills symbolic functions. At the age of four, a lock of hair is pulled from the head of every boy and girl and the act is celebrated appropriately (*ibid.*:73-74).

Later, when a girl reaches puberty, the ritual haircut is accompanied with celebrations whose solemnity is similar to that of Cuna and Desana ceremonies. At the time of first menstruation, the girl removes all her ornaments and hangs them in the house, if her mother is absent. She then hides in the bush. When her mother sees the ornaments she realizes what has happened, and she goes looking for her daughter, calling her. The girl responds by rubbing two dry sticks together. Thus she respects the taboos requiring silence and invisibility.

Screens of matting are placed around the girl's hammock to protect her from the hounding of evil spirits and from dangerous experiences. As night falls, the girl's mother conducts her to this enclosure. From then on the girl remains in seclusion, invisible and inaudible to everyone except her mother and her paternal aunt. At puberty both boys and girls are believed to be subject to extraordinary and supernatural experiences including contact with immortals and invisible demons (Nimuendajú 1952:73-74). The observance of the taboos surrounding a girl's first menstruation protects people from the negative forces that emanate from the being who is "marginal" or "impure" (Douglas 1978).

Preparations for the fiesta and subsequent traditional acts regulated by the initiation ritual may take more than two months. As among the Cuna, the father of the girl offers the feast, and it is very important for his social position. Musical instruments to be used in the ceremonies are kept under water, in the river, to keep them from drying out and to hide them. Masks representing different evil spirits are constructed. Appropriate songs are sung (Nimuendajú 1952:80-84).

Early in the ceremonies, the women of the initiate's family begin denuding her of her hair. The locks of the girl's forehead are drawn to the front and tied, while the rest of her hair is bound in the back. The shaman pretends to pull out her hair, and while he is holding the girl by her hair, everyone else present may cut off a lock, exclaiming "dy!" This exclamation with its mythical etymology, the preparation of the black infusion that is used to paint the body of the girl at dawn, follow preestablished norms. Red paint and feathers are used later to adorn the girl. On her head is placed a crown of bright plumage and rattles made of snail shells and bone. Relatives pull the feather crown over the girl's eyes and dance with her (Nimuendajú 1952:86-89). Likewise, we recall, the Desana girl was painted red and black.

The girl's paternal uncle pulls out a lock of her hair. After this she is led to the center of the house and seated on a tapir hide. A jar containing a brew is placed before her. Three to six women sit in a circle around the girl and pluck her hair, piling it on a mat, until there only remains, at the top of her head, a thin lock of hair that is painted red before being pulled out by her uncle and exhibited to the participants. These acts are also accompanied with the same exclamation "dy!" that gives an almost liturgical tenor to these acts. When the depilation is finished, the paternal uncle, the master of ceremonies of this ritual, directs a sermon to the initiate. The purpose of his words is to teach her duties as a wife, affirming the purpose of the ritual which is to insure order in the behavior of future nuclear family members.

Six or eight months later, when the girl's hair has begun to grow back, she is subjected to the final haircut, which leaves her with bangs. This is a supplemental and preventative act, to "burn the fleas", the ultimate symbolic traces of evil spirits, who from her first menstruation have been menacing the girl (Nimuendajú 1952:86-89).

The first acts that imitate the depilation rite and the final ones are important for the social relationships of those who sponsor the celebrations. The submerging of the musical instruments used for the dancing, the food preparation, brewing, costumes that are destroyed at the end of the fiesta, the mythical tales, are all parts of a unified whole, codified according to ancestral and legendary patterns.

The female puberty rituals of the Cuna, the Desana, and the Tukuna show similar patterns and analogous contexts, interpretable according to Douglas's structuralist analysis. The young lady who is menstruating for the first time is not yet an adult. Her state of marginality engenders "impurities" and is a "sickness" caused by invisible evil spirits. To defend themselves against these malign forces people raise the barriers of taboos.

To differentiate the girl symbolically from the rest of her group, one uses a sign, that, according to the available evidence, is the same - depilation. The other rules of conduct are the same in the three cases described and in the vast majority of others from the Andes to Amazonia, including the Sirionó described by Meggers (1973:83). Such a high degree of similarity is very surprising, even though it is not attributable to processes of cultural borrowing.

The sequences of similar rules for the fulfillment of ritual follows the biological order of the gradual physical development of the female body from puberty to the time it is ready to begin the reproductive cycle. Thus, physiology transformed into symbolism and myth imparts precepts through which the natural order is respected. The female body can attain its reproductive function only when its sexual organs are perfectly mature.

The mythological content of the Cuna's "Song of the Scissors", the dramatic stories that the Tukuna recite, and the puberty ritual of the Desana, inseparable from the cosmology of this culture, as well as the similar rites followed along the length and breadth of

tropical South America, lead me to affirm that the archaic essence of the female puberty ritual, solemnized by the girls' haircut, has its roots in the remote history of the indigenous American peoples. A page of this history was written, iconographically, by the Valdivia culture.

Discussion

From the descriptions of the Cuna, Desana, and Tukuna puberty rituals it becomes clear that these were carried out in domestic contexts. There the menstruating girl was confined within a narrow space. Likewise, the Valdivia female figurines are found within domestic space, leading us to suppose that the ritual act in which they took part was conducted there.

The act of ritual depilation and its repetition, when the physical development of the lowland girl was complete, visually reflects, in its various forms, from the most extensive depilation, in figures without curves, to the least obvious on the already developed bodies of adolescents. The various hair manipulations, seconded by Cuna songs, seem to be reflected in some of the complicated Valdivia hairstyles.

Perhaps the figures whose gaze is hidden beneath the shadow of a hood reflect the consignment to invisibility. Couldn't the hand resting the chin that we find on some figurines imply the keeping of silence? I believe that the lack of arms on the figurines with small breasts can be a way of symbolically expressing the physical and mental state of a girl incapable of undertaking heavy work. It is to rescue the girl from physical inertia that the Desana and the Tukuna impose difficult and tedious tasks upon them as part of the puberty ritual.

The red slip on the shaven parts of the figurines in categories 1-3, those from the San Pablo site that were rubbed with mineral pigments (Zevallos and Holm 1960:70), would be an analogy with the red pigment applied to the nude body of the Cuna girl and that used in the Desana and Tukuna rituals. So many parallels between the ethnographic evidence and archaeological iconography reinforce, in my opinion, the basis of my hypothesis that the female puberty ritual was an important factor in the domestic structure within the social context of the Valdivia culture.

Conclusion

Valdivia figurines that exhibit obvious smoothing on the middle of the head support the hypothesis that in Valdivia society a female puberty ritual was conducted. The ritually precarious state in which a girl found herself between her first menstruation and her complete physical maturity was signaled by the shaving of half of her hair.

The same iconography of these artifacts allows me to affirm that these figurines represent sexually immature female bodies. Thanks to an anthropological focus I can arrive at an approximation of the implications of the lack of arms or their imprecise representation, of the presence of the swelling above the pubis, and the simultaneous evidence of depilation.

Archaeological evidence for the concentration of these figurines in domestic contexts reinforces the hypothesis that they were exclusively female, because the home is the microcosm in which the life of the woman unfolds in the cultures of the American tropical forests, like Valdivia. Comparisons with ethnographic evidence has reinforced my ideas. Nevertheless, with the exception of the fifteen figurines recovered from archaeologically controlled contexts at Real Alto and published by Marcos (1988), and those from La Clementina (Moncayo, personal communication, February 1992), the examples that could be studied are from undocumented contexts. In the future it will be necessary to test my ideas against more material from good stratigraphic contexts.

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I thank my husband, Alberto, for his unselfish understanding. My grandson, Eduardo Kohn shared the both pleasure of discovery and the work of revision with me. Patricia Netherly offered constructive criticisms of preliminary versions of this article. Karen Olsen Bruhns and Ernesto Salazar provided unceasing and valuable aid. Patri-

cio Moncayo granted permission to photograph the lithic figurines found in his excavations of the La Clementina site and put his data and collections at my disposal. Likewise, Gogó Anhalzer and Betty Wappenstein granted me access to their private collections. I thank James A. Zeidler and Scott Raymond for advice on chronology and other matters. The drawings accompanying this article were produced by Guillermo Caravajal and Franz Ríos. All photos, unless otherwise stated, are by Karen Olsen Bruhns. Monica Barnes made this edited translation from an unpublished Spanish version. To all of these friends and colleagues I offer my sincere thanks.

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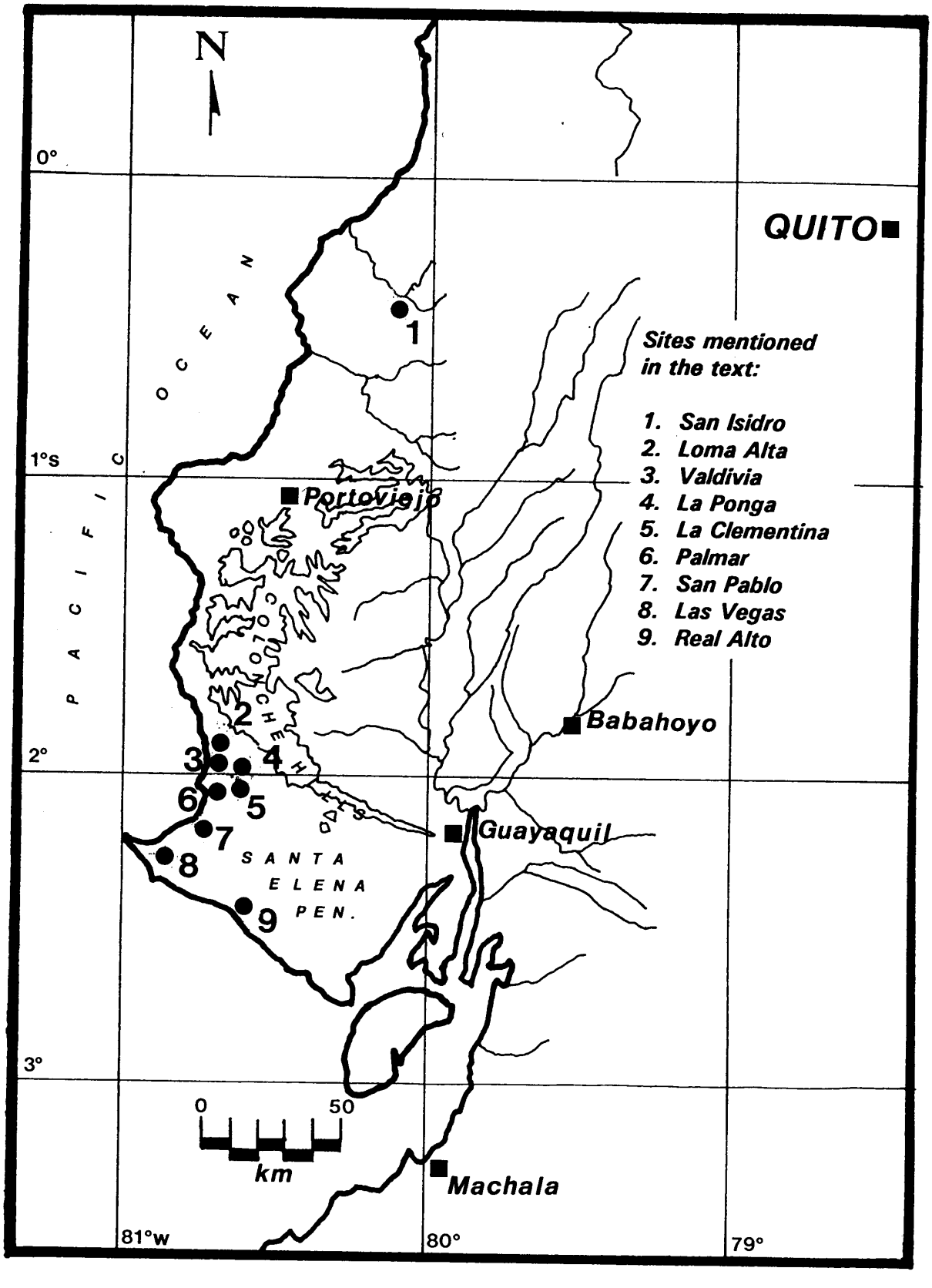


Figure 1. Map of sites mentioned in this paper.

Chronology of the Valdivia Figurines

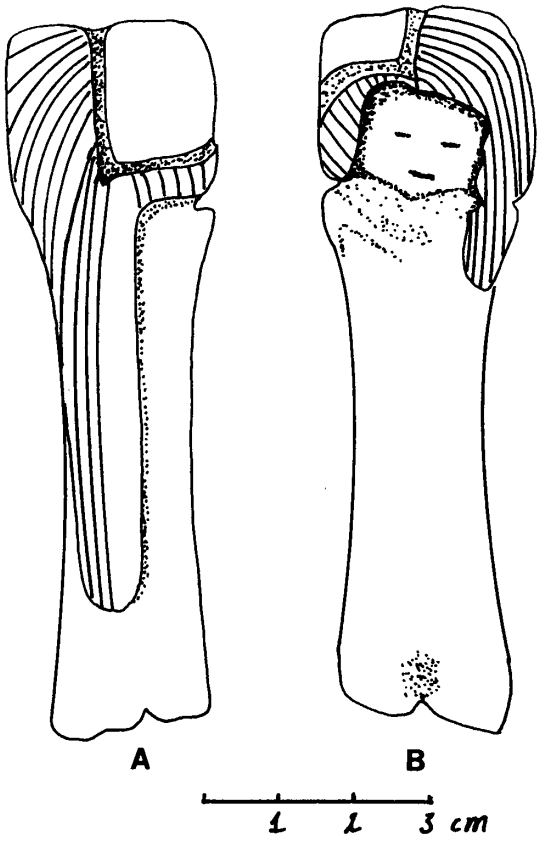
	Site/ V 1	Site/ V1	Site/ V 2	Site/ V 2
stone	La Clem.	Real Alto Loma Alta	La Clem.	Real Alto (?) Loma Alta the three types concur Ra
flat	many	few	few	----
ellipsoid	few	some	painted with tar	painted with tar
depilated	one	----	----	----

	Site/ V 2	Site/ V 3	Site/ V 4 and 5	Site/ V 6
stone--*ellipsoid*	La Clem.; Real Alto some	Real Alto some	Real Alto some	San Pablo; Real Alto some
ceramic				
hood, flat body	many	some	----	some
depilated, flat body	----	some	some	----
adult, elaborate headdress	Real Alto present	present	----	many
oblique eyes and head (deformed?)	----	----	present	present
seated position; Hocker	present	(present	----	----
tigrillo headdress	----	present	----	present
tablet in head-dress (pregnant?)	----	present	----	present

	Site/ V 7	Site/ V 8
adult	Real Alto	----
seated	----	San Isidro, pres. (unpublished)
pregnant and hooded, not incised, without tablet	----	present (unpublished)

Sources: Lundberg 1977; Marcos 1988, Vol I; Raymond perso. comm. 1993; Zevallos and Holm 1960; and others.

Figure 2. The stages of female physical development and their iconographic representations on Valdivia figurines.



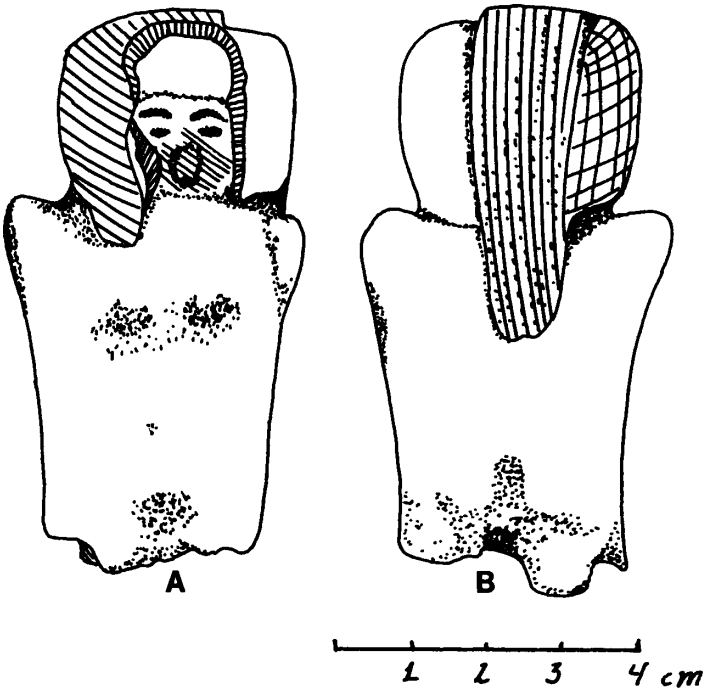
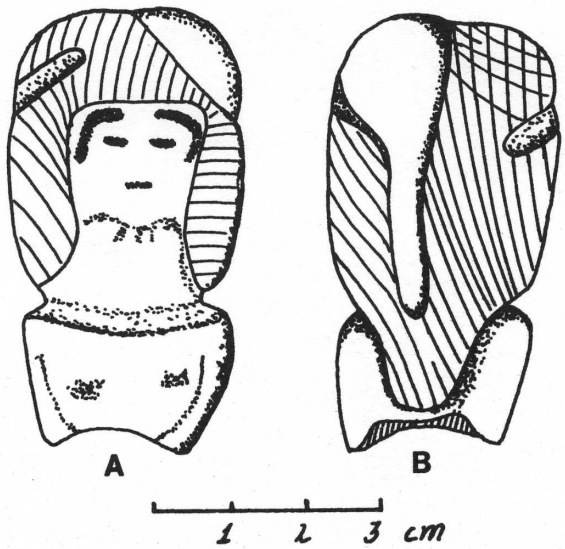


Figure 3. (*above*) Valdivia figurine representing the pre-puberty stage. A: rear view. B: front view. Anhalzer Collection, Quito.

Figure 4. (*below*) Figurine representing the puberty stage. A: front view. B: rear view. Di Capua Collection, Quito.



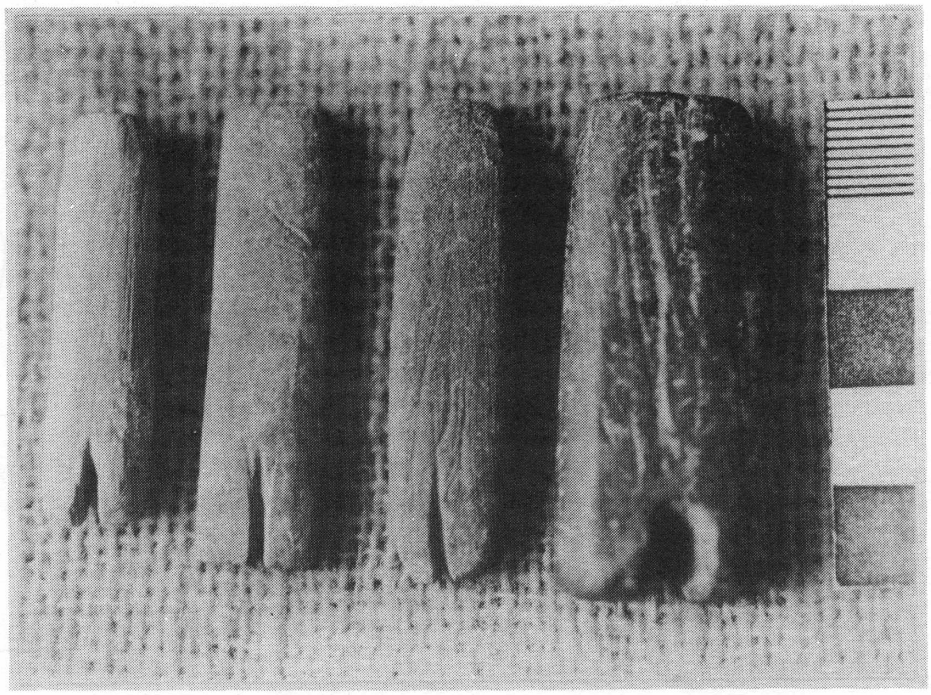


Figure 5. (*above*) Figurine representing the adolescence stage. A: front view. B: rear view. Anhalzer Collection, Quito.

Figure 6. (*below*) Four plain lithic figurines found within the same archaeological context (1.00-1.20 meter level; Gu S.E.-C.C.) at the La Clementina site. Photo courtesy of Patricio Moncayo.

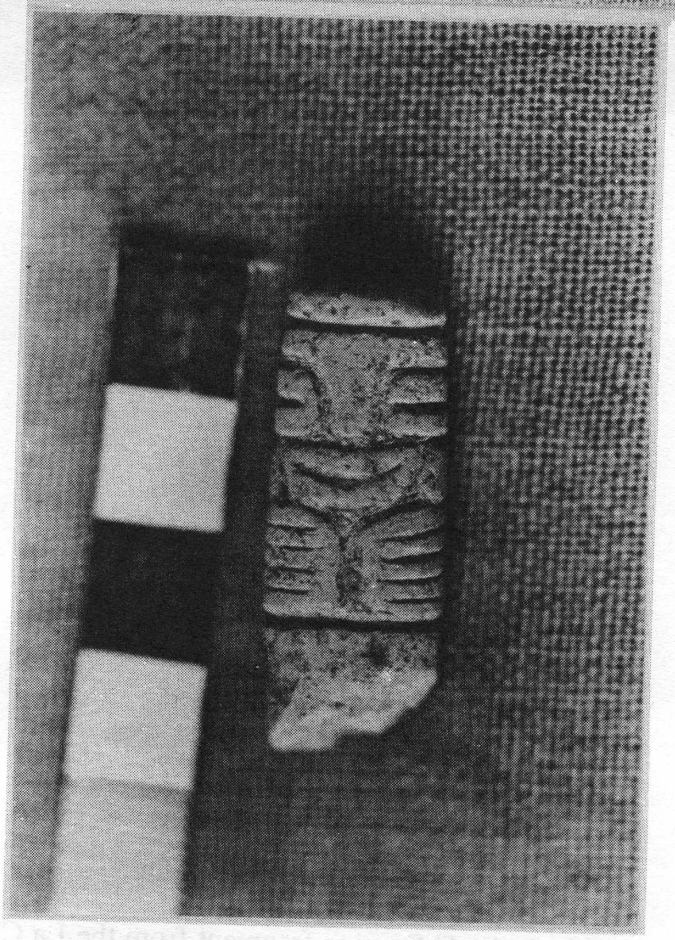


Figure 7. (*above*) Five notched and wedge-shaped lithic figurines found within the same archaeological context (1.00-1.20 meter level; Gu S.E.-C.A.) at the La Clementina site. Photo courtesy of Patricio Moncayo.

Figure 8. (*below*) "Palmar Incised" figurine fragment from the La Clementina site. Photo courtesy of Patricio Moncayo.

Figure 9. (*above, left*) "Palmar Incised" figurine fragment from the La Clementina site. Photo courtesy of Patricio Moncayo.

Figure 10. (*above, right*) "Palmar Incised" figurine fragment from the La Clementina site. Photo courtesy of Patricio Moncayo.

Figure 11. (*below*) "Palmar Incised" figurine. Anhalzer Collection, Quito.

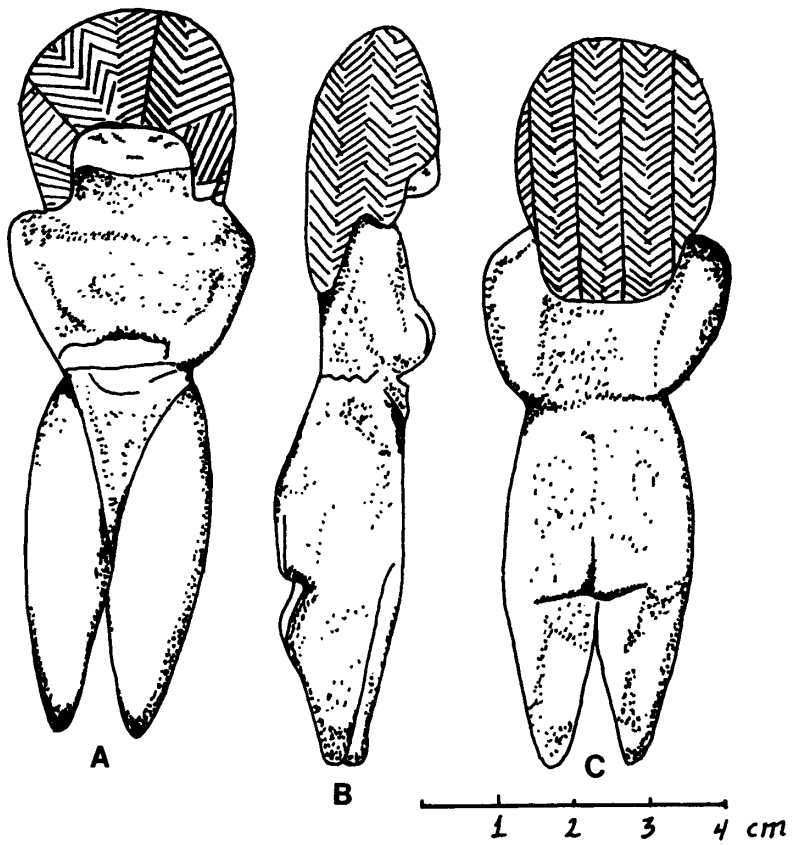
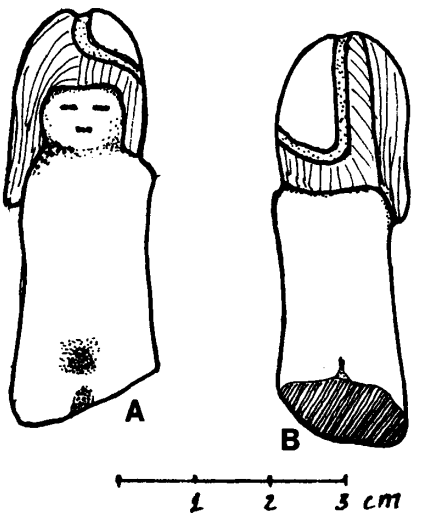


Figure 12. Valdivia phase 2 figurine representing the adult stage. A: front view. B: profile view. C: rear view. After Marcos 1988 I:91.



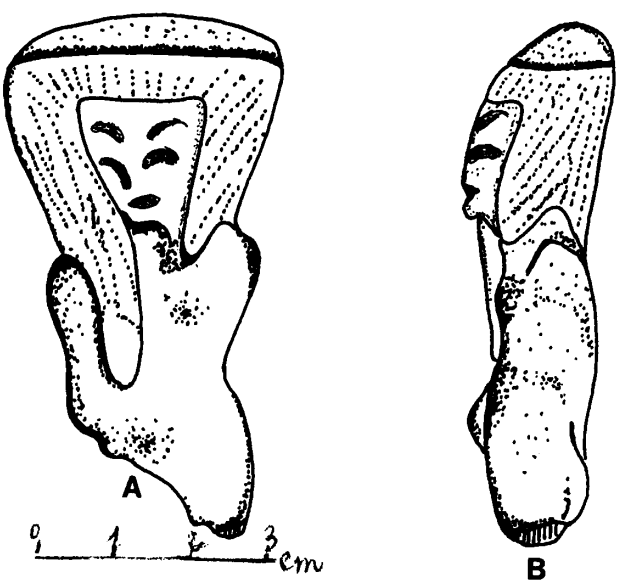
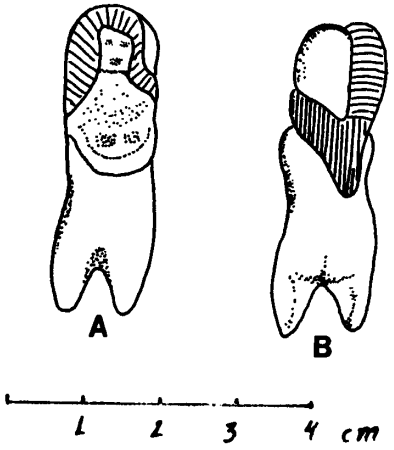


Figure 13. (*above*) Figurine representing the pre-puberty stage. A: front view. B: rear view. Anhalzer Collection, Quito.

Figure 14. (*below*) Figurine representing the puberty stage. A: front view. B: rear view. Wappenstein Collection, Quito.



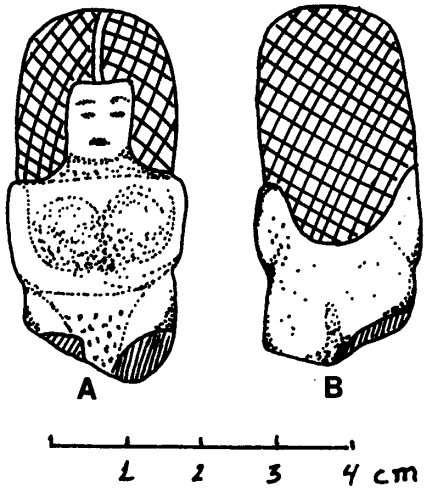
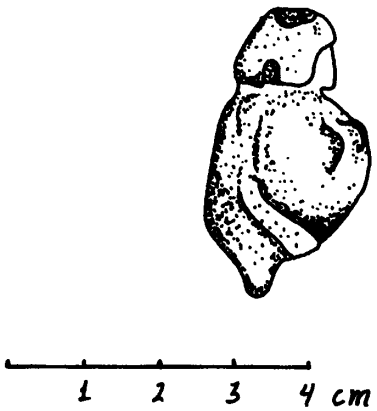


Figure 15. (*above*) Figurine representing the adolescence stage. A: front view. B: rear view. Anhalzer Collection, Quito.

Figure 16. (*below*) Figurine representing the adult stage. A: front view. B: rear view. Di Capua Collection, Quito.



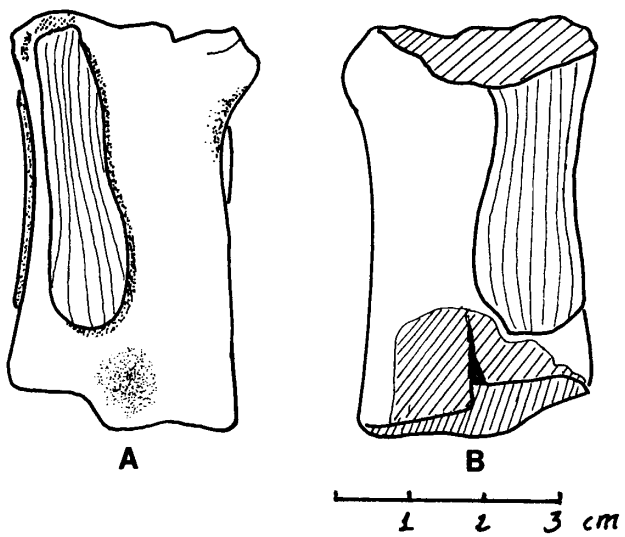
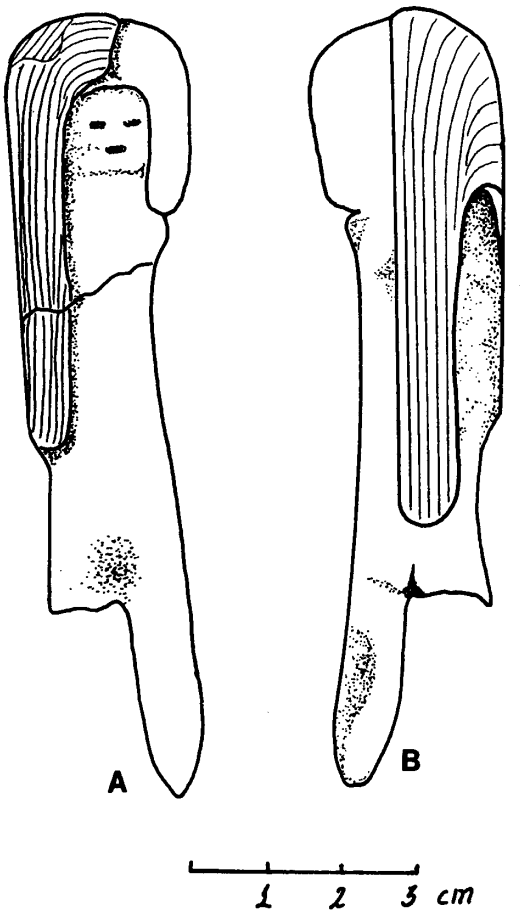


Figure 17. (*above*) Figurine representing pregnancy. Museo del Banco Central, Quito, accession number V2-35-82.

Figure 18. (*below*) Figurine fragment representing the half-depilated head characteristic of the pre-puberty stage. A: front view. B: rear view. Anhalzer Collection, Quito.



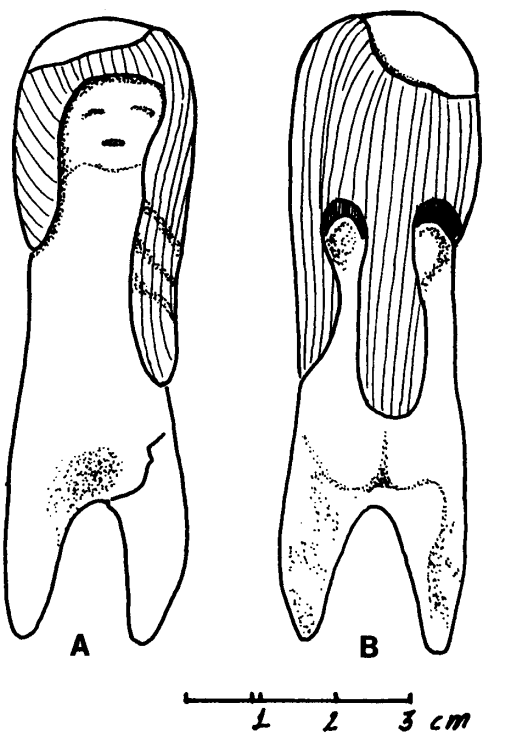


Figure 19. (*above*) Figurine with the half-depilated head characteristic of the pre-puberty stage. A: front view. B: rear view. Anhalzer Collection, Quito.

Figure 20. (*below*) Figurine with the half-depilated head characteristic of the pre-puberty stage. A: front view. B: rear view. Anhalzer Collection, Quito.

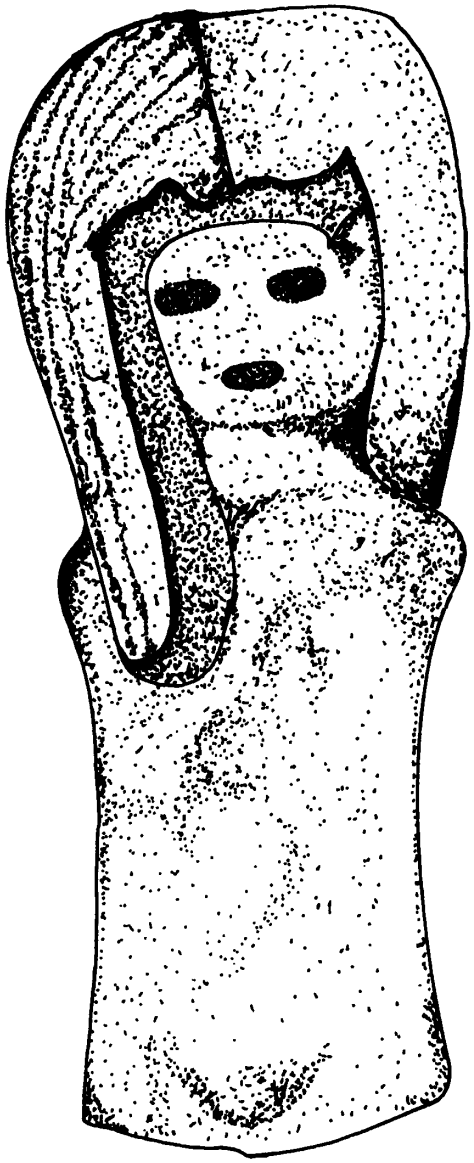
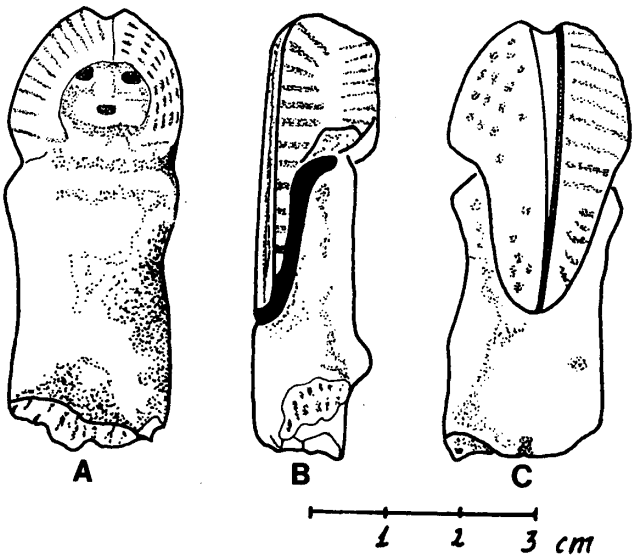
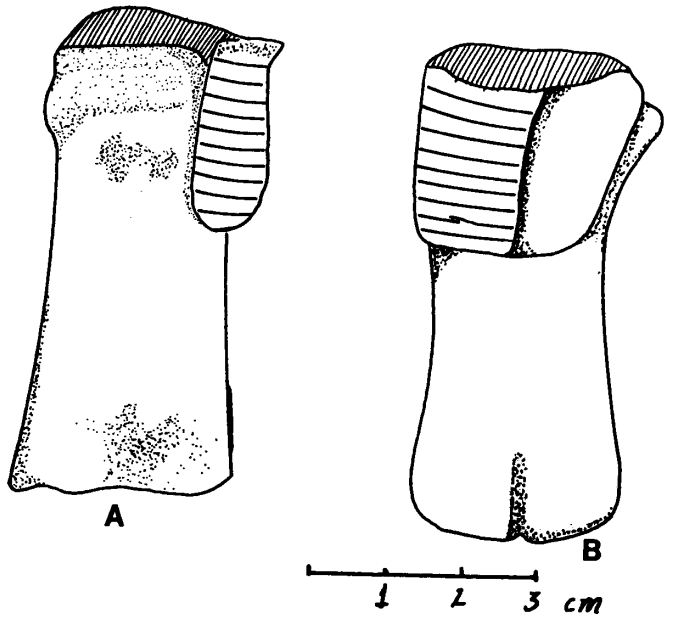


Figure 21. Figurine with the half-depilated head characteristic of the pre-puberty stage. After Marcos 1988 II:327.





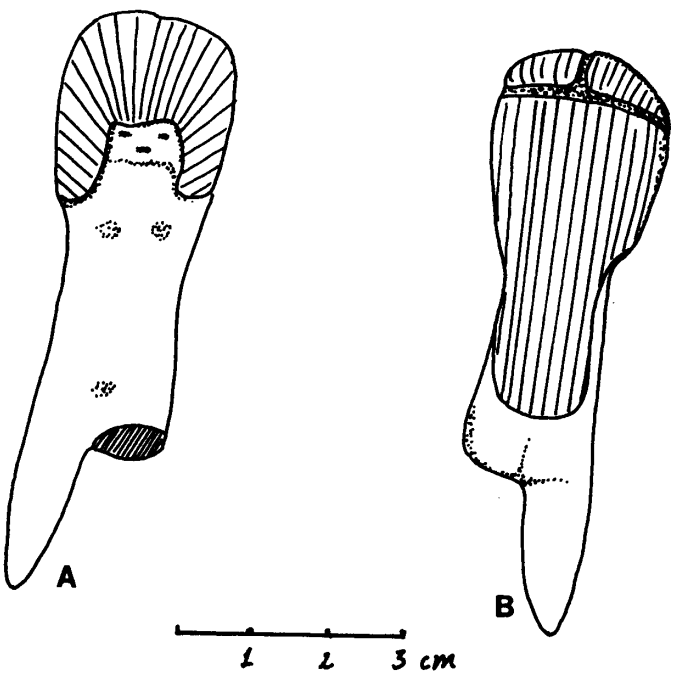


Figure 22. (*above, left*) Figurine with the half-depilated head characteristic of the pre-puberty stage. A: front view. B: profile view. C: rear view. After Marcos 1988 I:97.

Figure 23. (*above, right*) Figurine fragment representing the head hair as depilated or irregularly cut. Puberty stage. A: front view. B: rear view. Di Capua Collection, Quito.

Figure 24. (*below*) Figurine representing head hair as partially depilated. Puberty stage. A: front view. B: rear view. Anhalzer Collection, Quito.

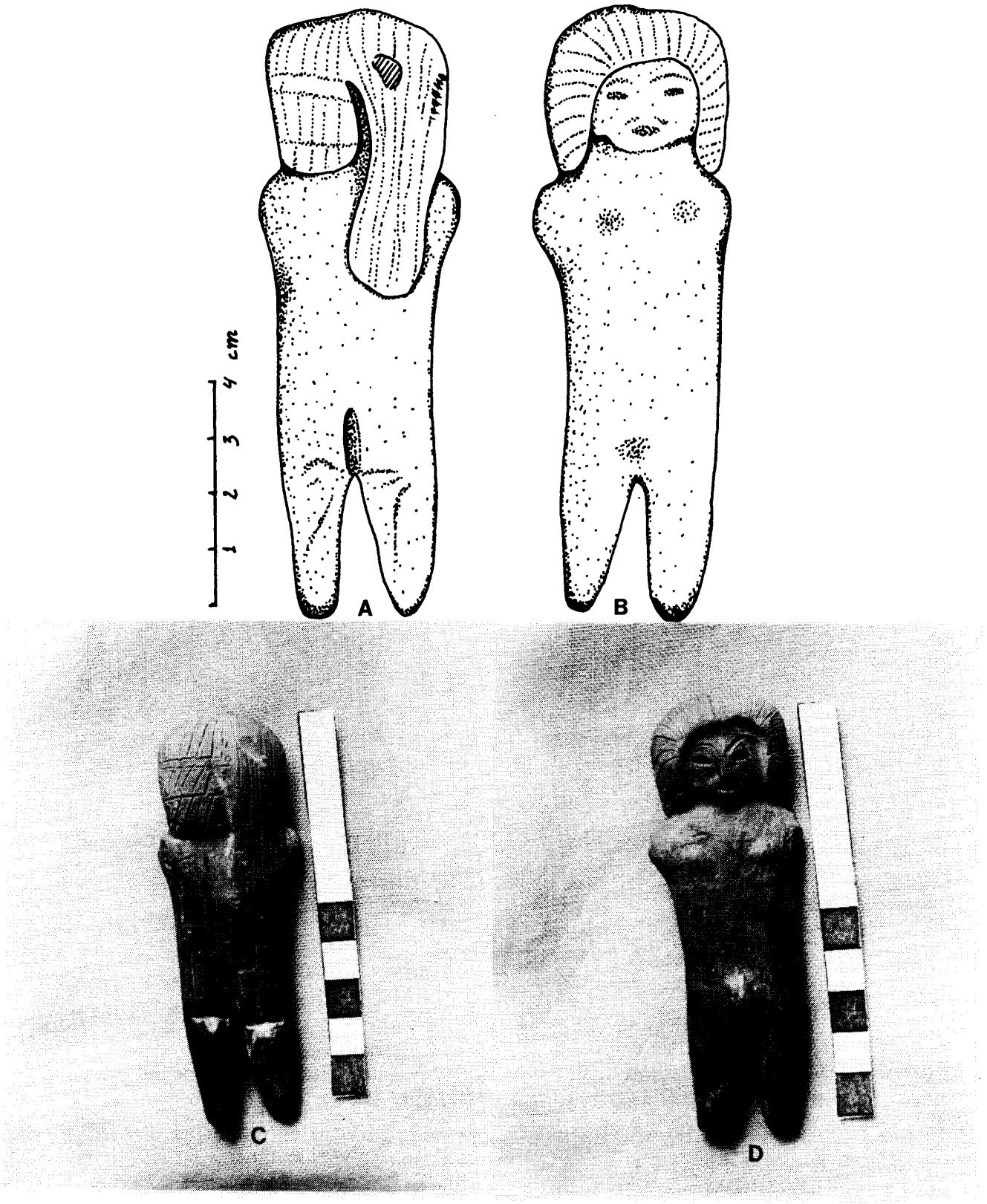
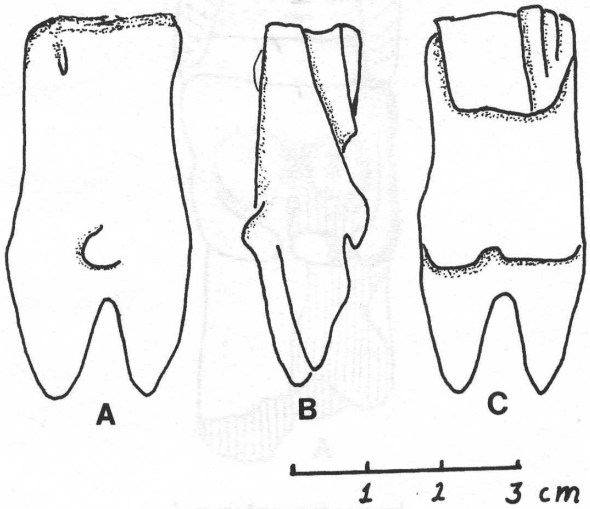
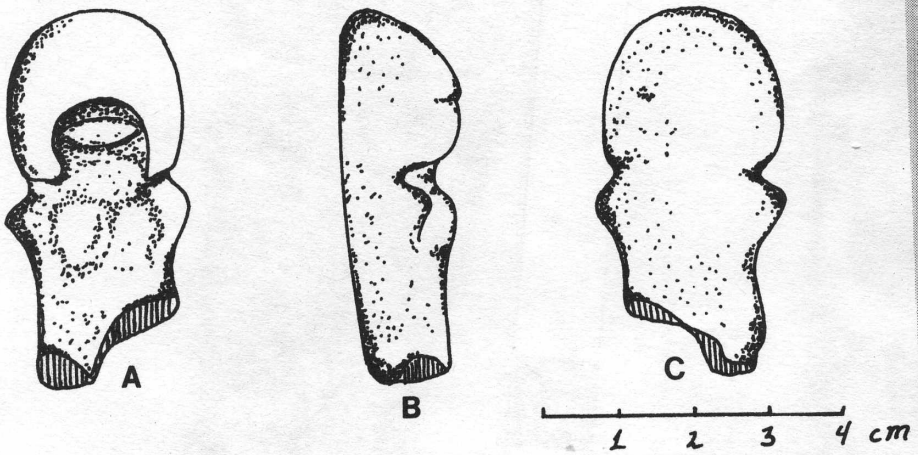


Figure 25. Figurine representing irregularly cut hair. Puberty stage. A: drawing, rear view. B: drawing, front view. C: photo, rear view. D: photo, front view. Anhalzer Collection, Quito.





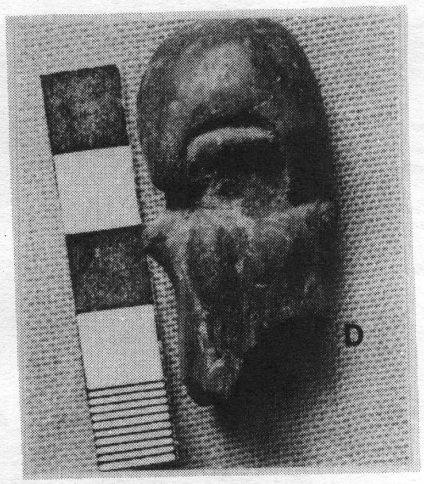
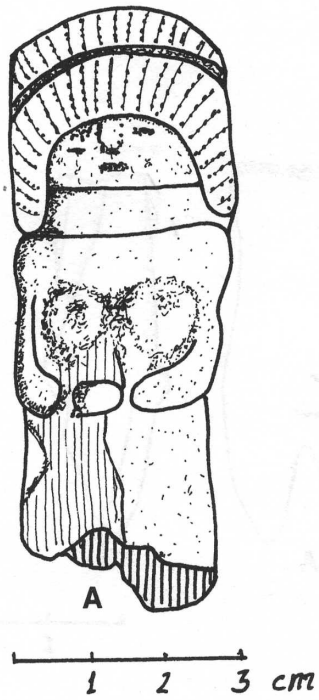


Figure 26. (*above*) Figurine fragment representing irregularly cut hair. Puberty stage. A: front view. B: profile view. C: rear view. After Marcos 1988 I:101.

Figure 27. (*below*) Hooded figurine representing the puberty stage. A: drawing, front view. B: drawing, profile view. C: drawing, rear view. D: photo, front view. Di Capua Collection, Quito.



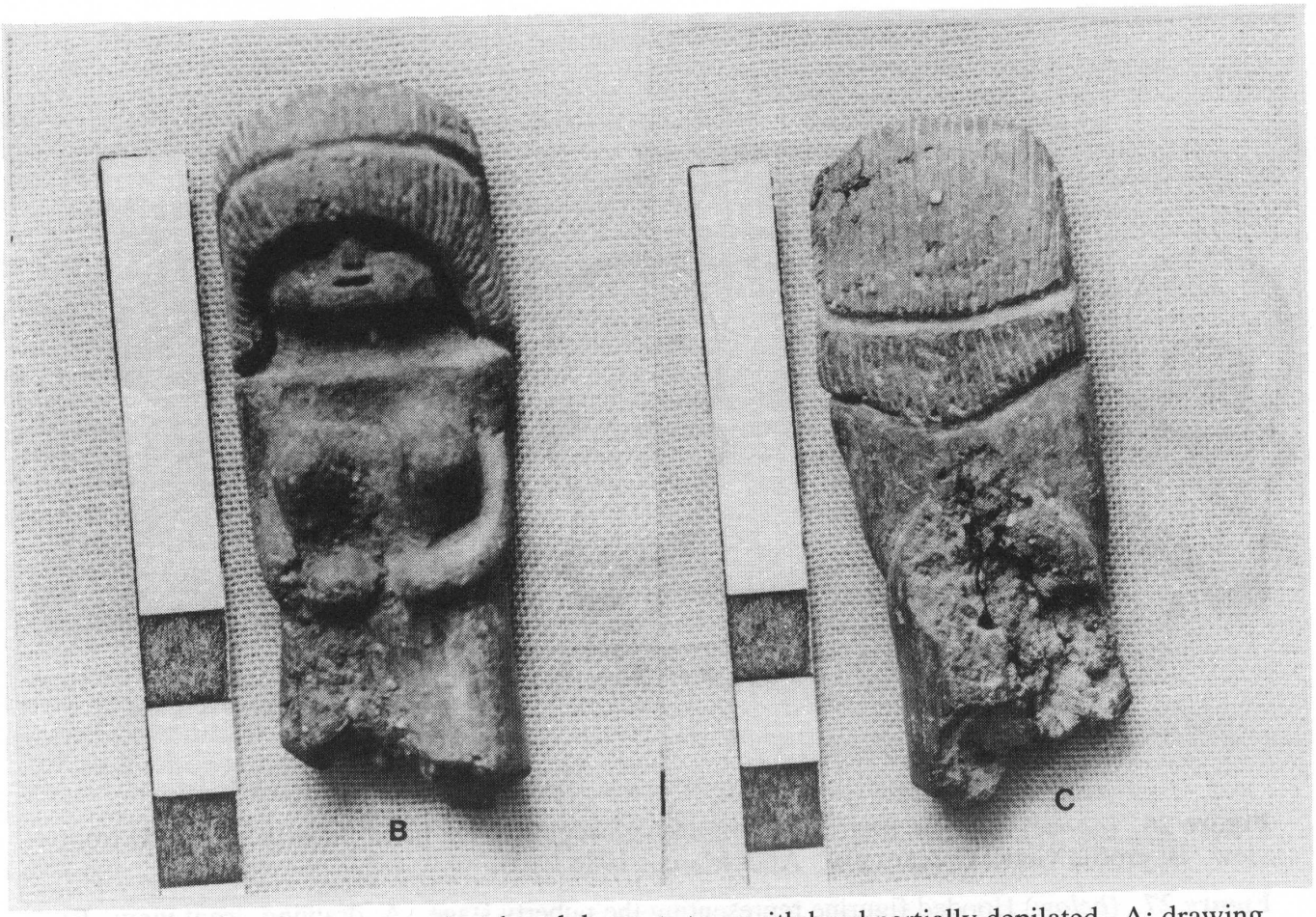
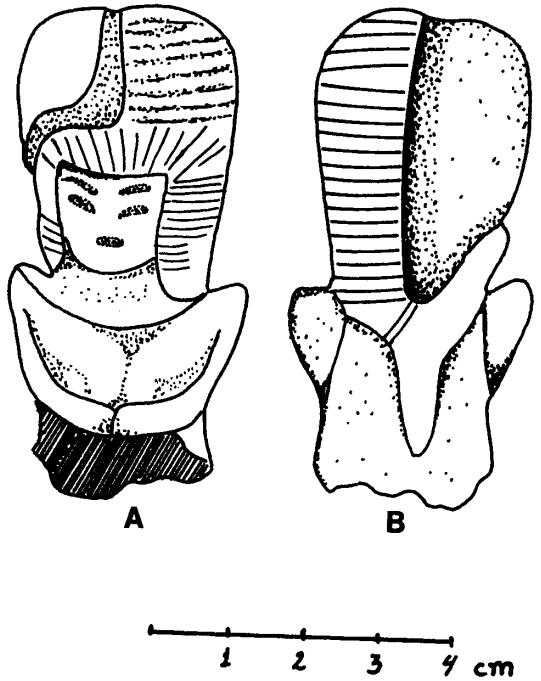


Figure 28. Figurine representing the adolescent stage with head partially depilated. A: drawing, front view. B: photo, front view. C: photo, rear view. Di Capua Collection, Quito.



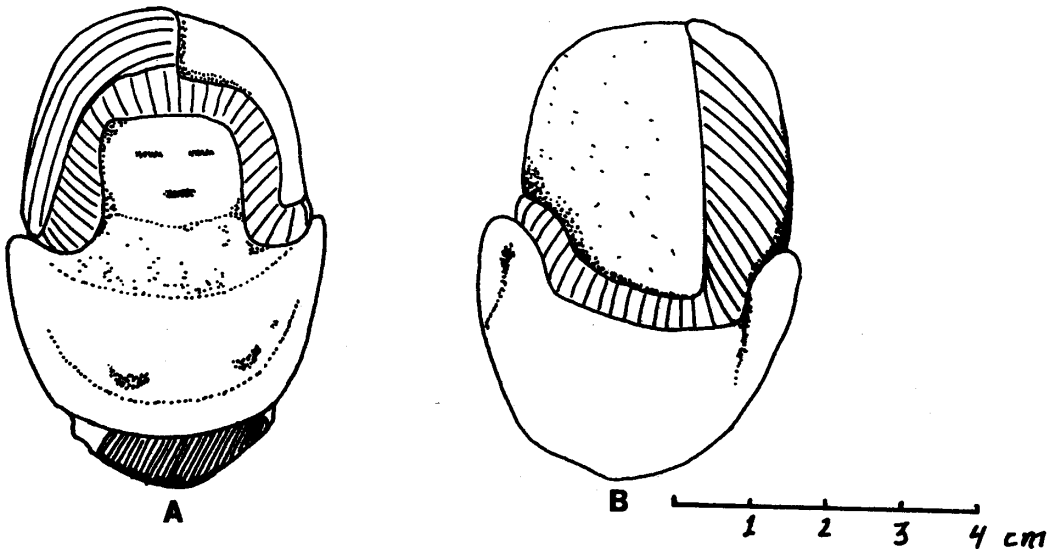
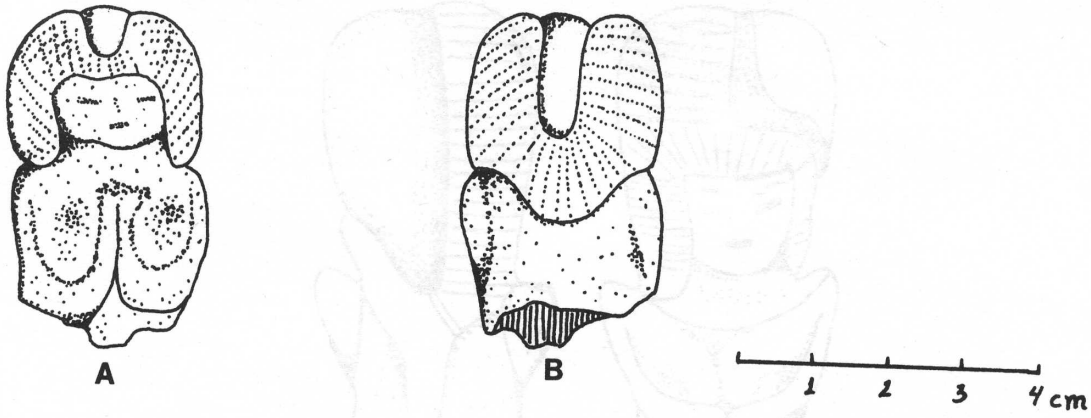


Figure 29. (*above*) Figurine representing the adolescent stage with head partially depilated. A: front view. B: rear view. After Evans, Meggers, and Estrada 1959:figure 97.

Figure 30. (*below*) Figurine representing the adolescent stage with the head partially depilated. A: front view. B: rear view. Anhalzer Collection, Quito.



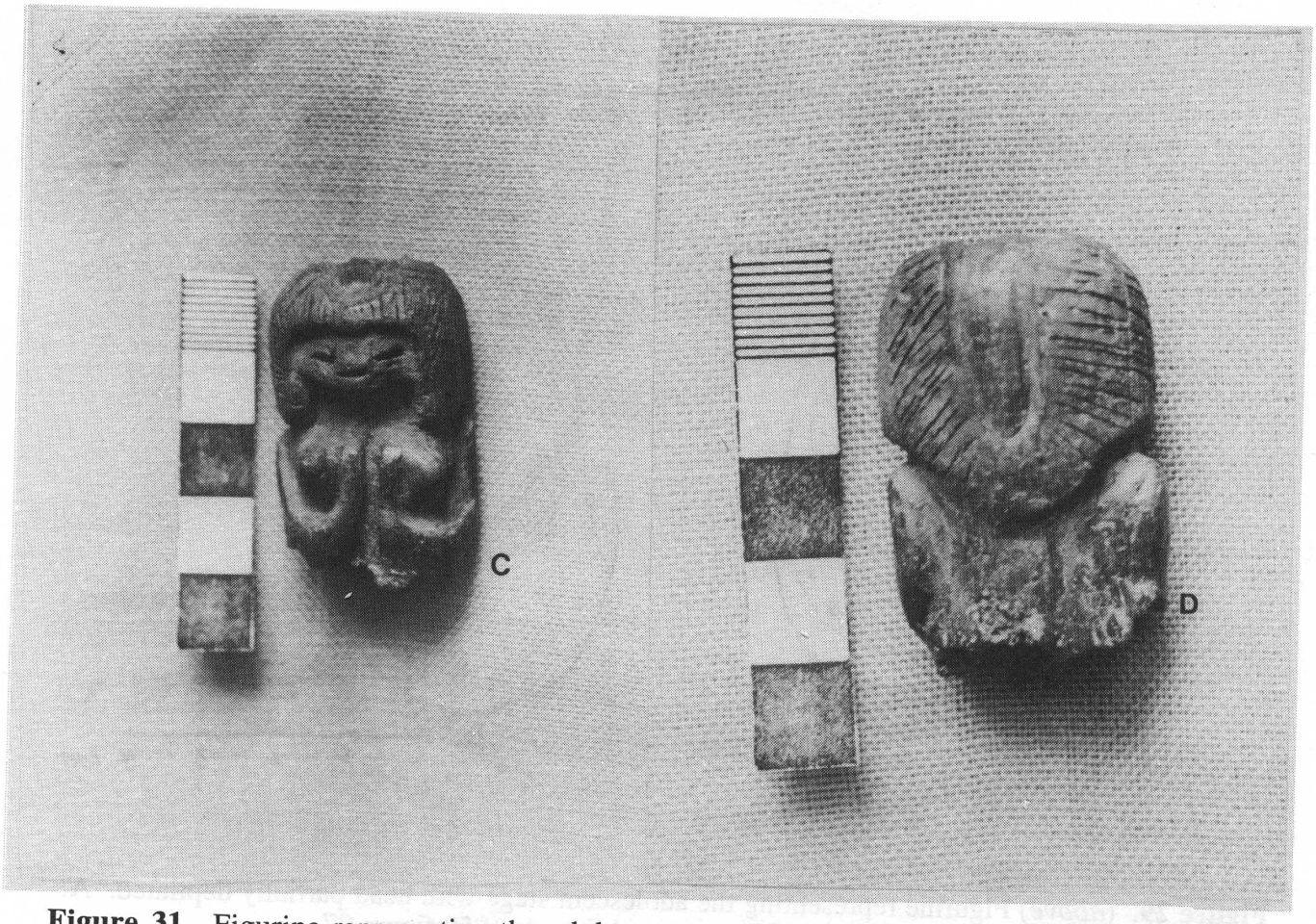


Figure 31. Figurine representing the adolescent stage with the head partially depilated. A: drawing, front view. B: drawing, rear view. C: photo, front view. D: photo, rear view. Anhalzer Collection, Quito.

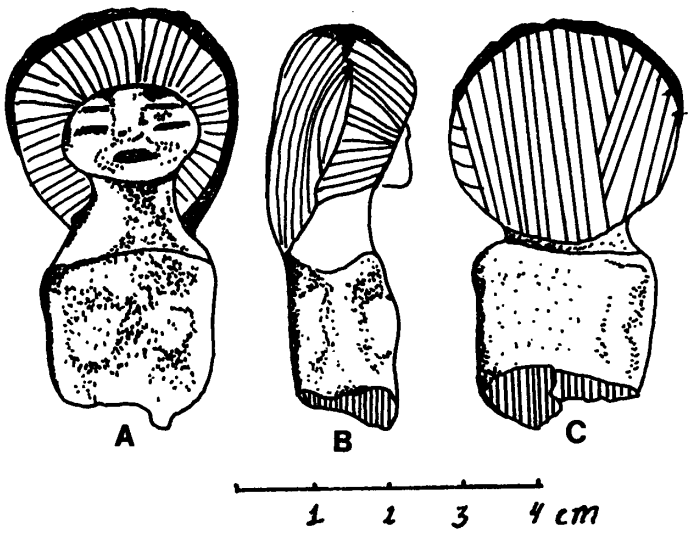


Figure 32. Figurine representing the adult stage. A: front view. B: profile view. C: rear view. After Marcos 1988 I:97.

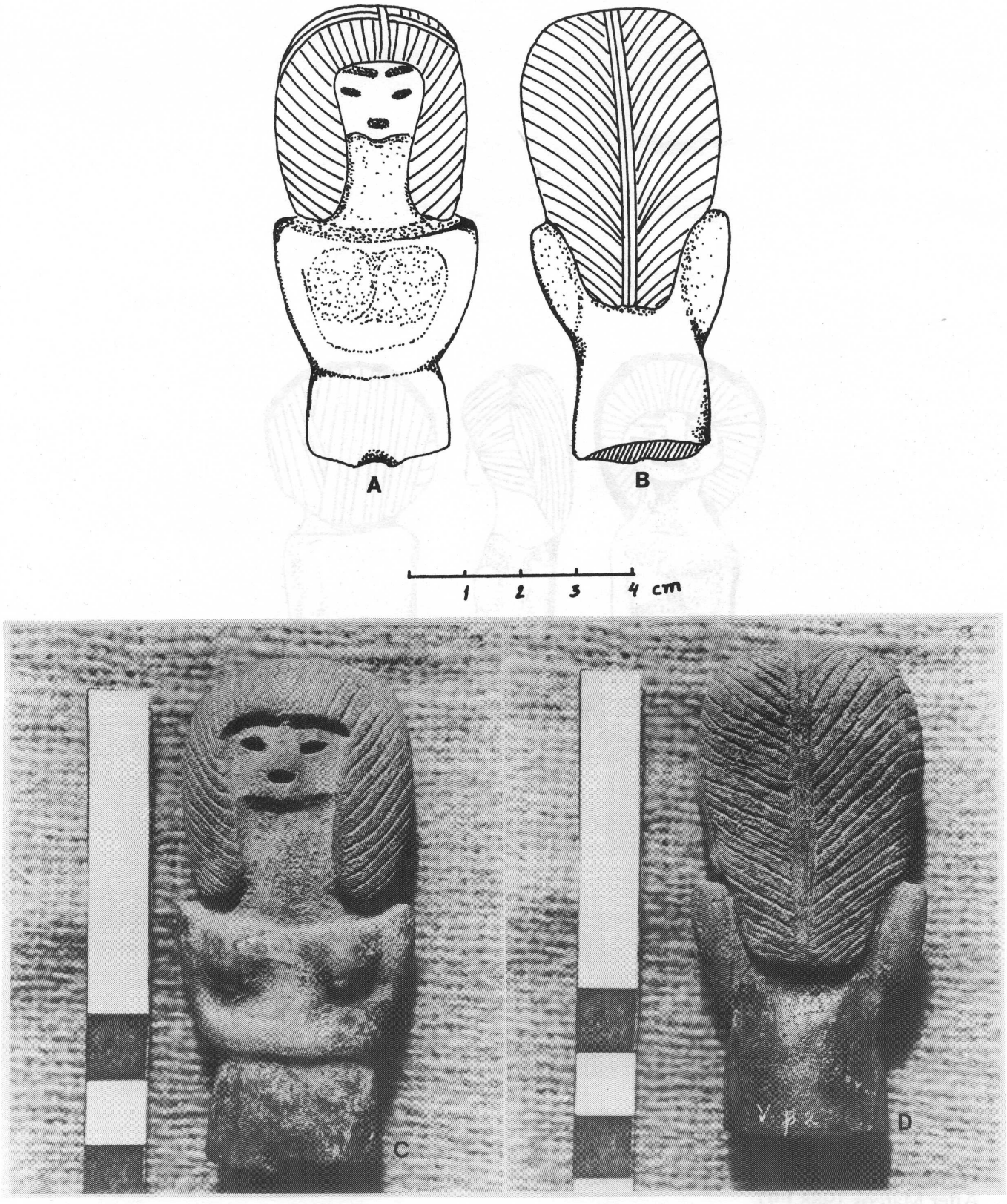
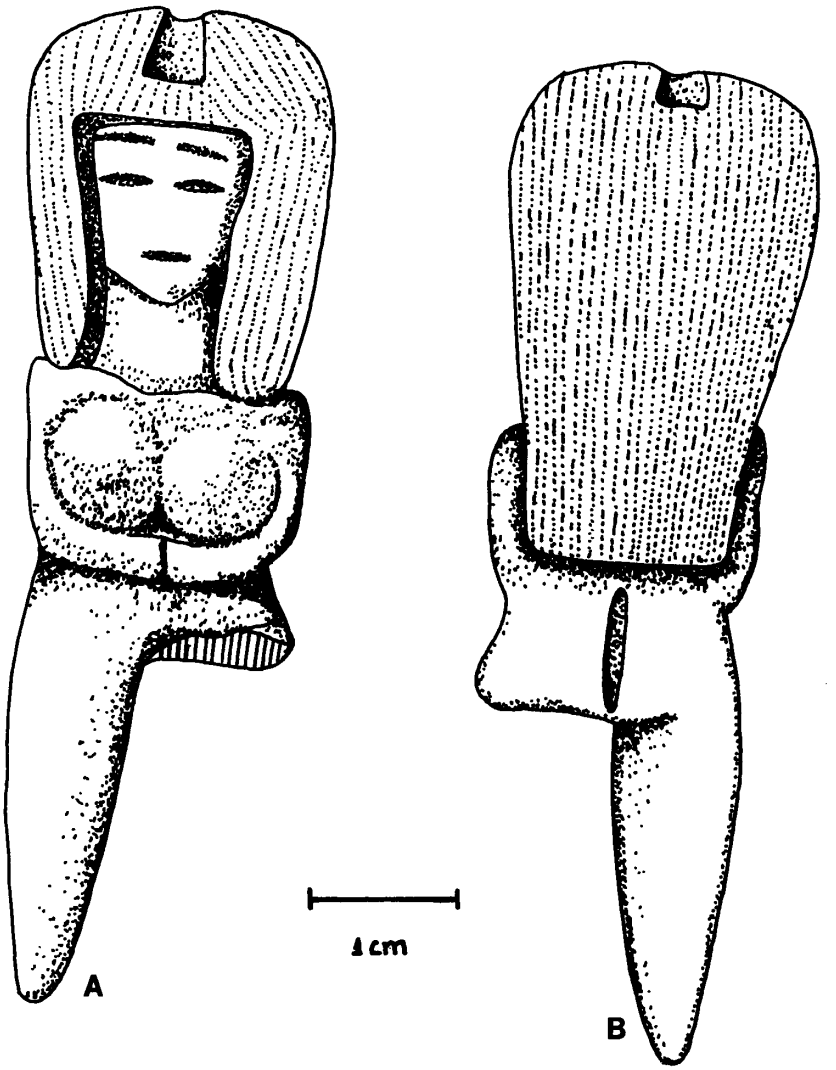


Figure 33. Figurine representing the adult stage with the "herring bone" coiffure. A: drawing, front view. B: drawing, rear view. C: photo, front view. D: Photo, rear view. Di Capua Collection, Quito.



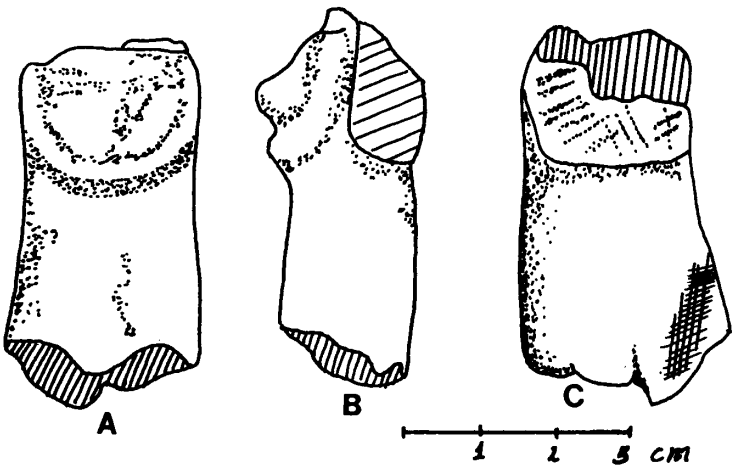
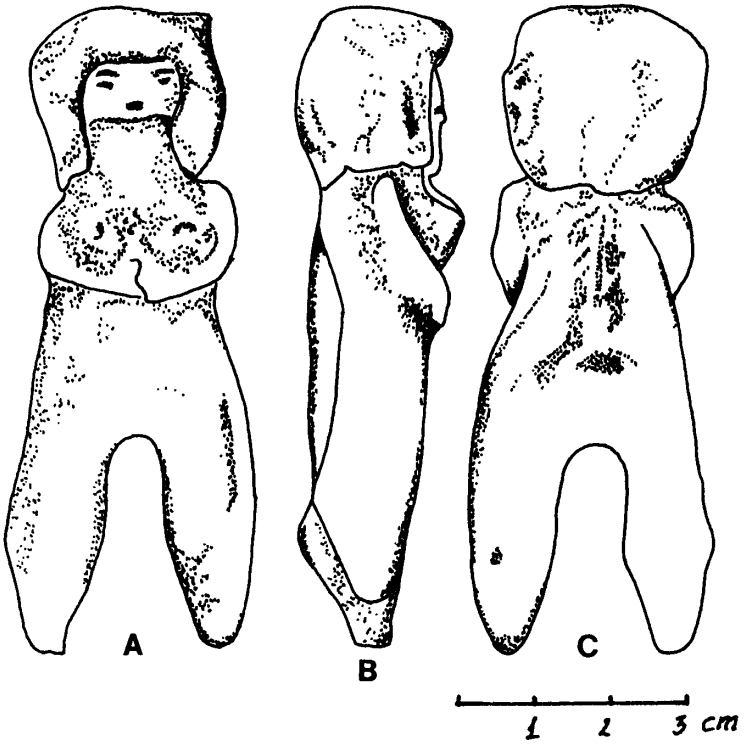


Figure 34. (*above*) Figurine representing the adult stage. A: front view. B: rear view. After Evans, Meggers, and Estrada 1959:118.

Figure 35. (*below*) Figurine representing the adult stage. A: front view. B: profile. C: rear view. After Marcos 1988 I:102.



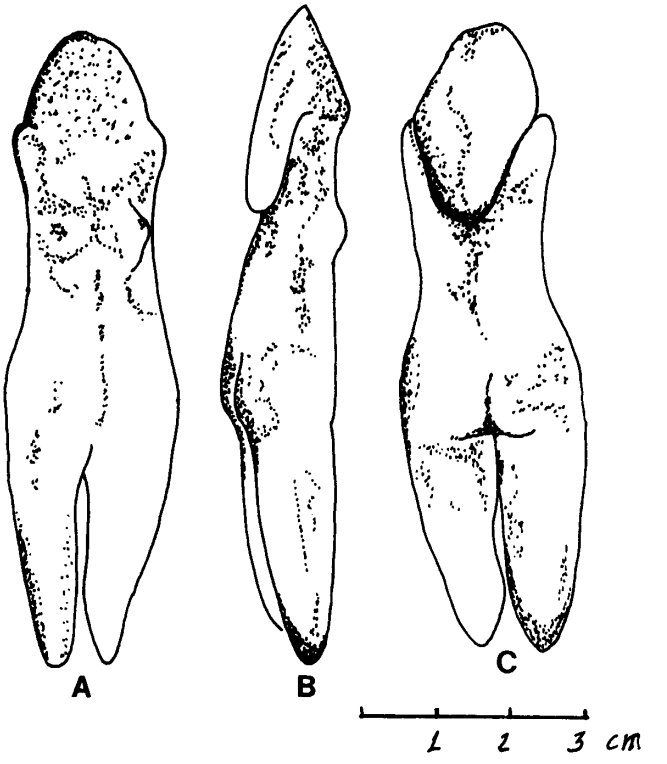


Figure 36. (*above*) Figurine representing the adult stage. A: front view. B: profile. C: rear view. After Marcos 1988 I:95.

Figure 37. (*below*) Figurine representing the adult stage. A: front view. B: profile. C: rear view. After Marcos 1988 I:96.

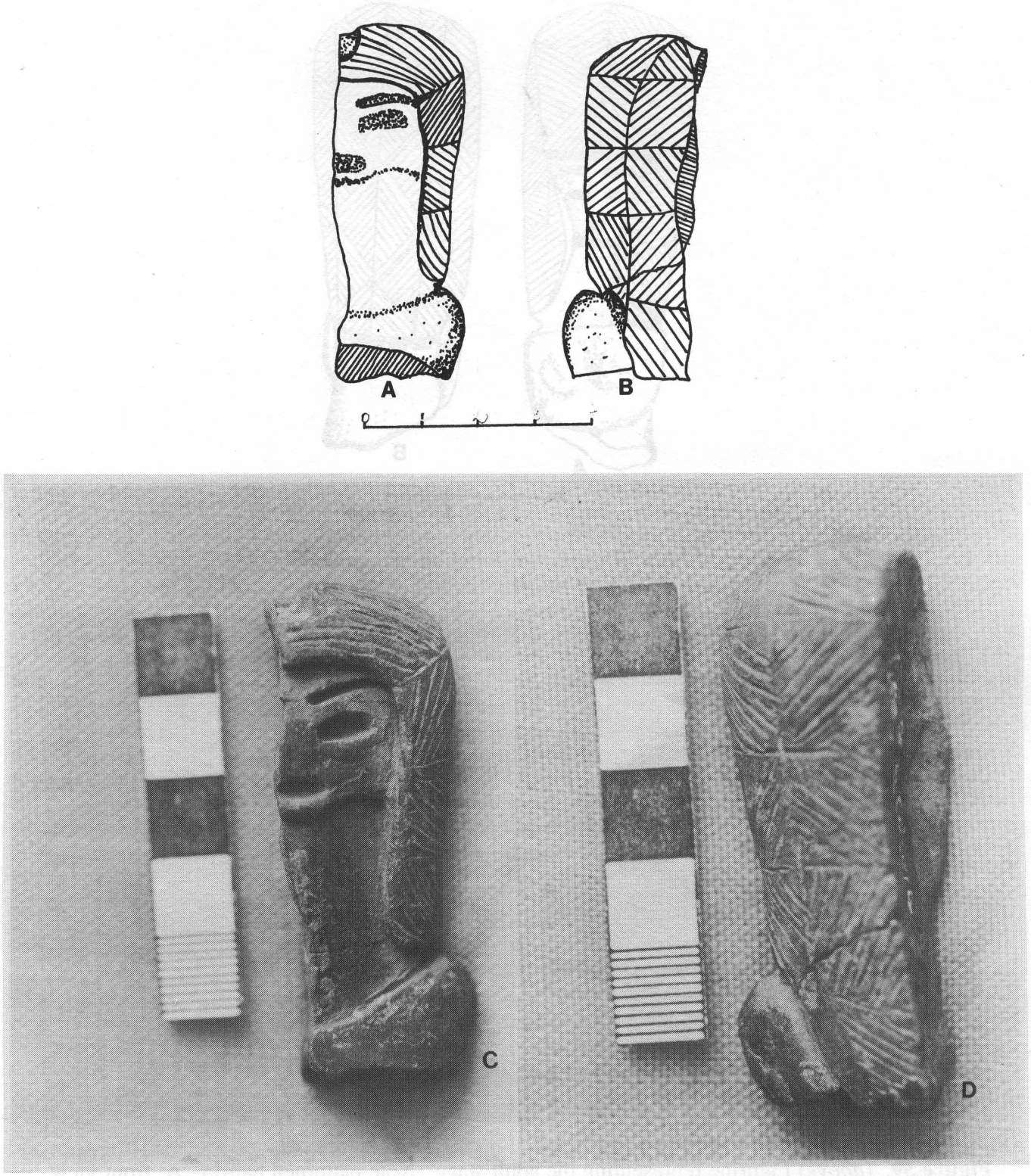


Figure 38. Figurine fragment representing the adult stage. Note patterned hairdo. A: drawing, front view. B: drawing, rear view. C: photo, front view. D: photo, rear view. Di Capua Collection, Quito.

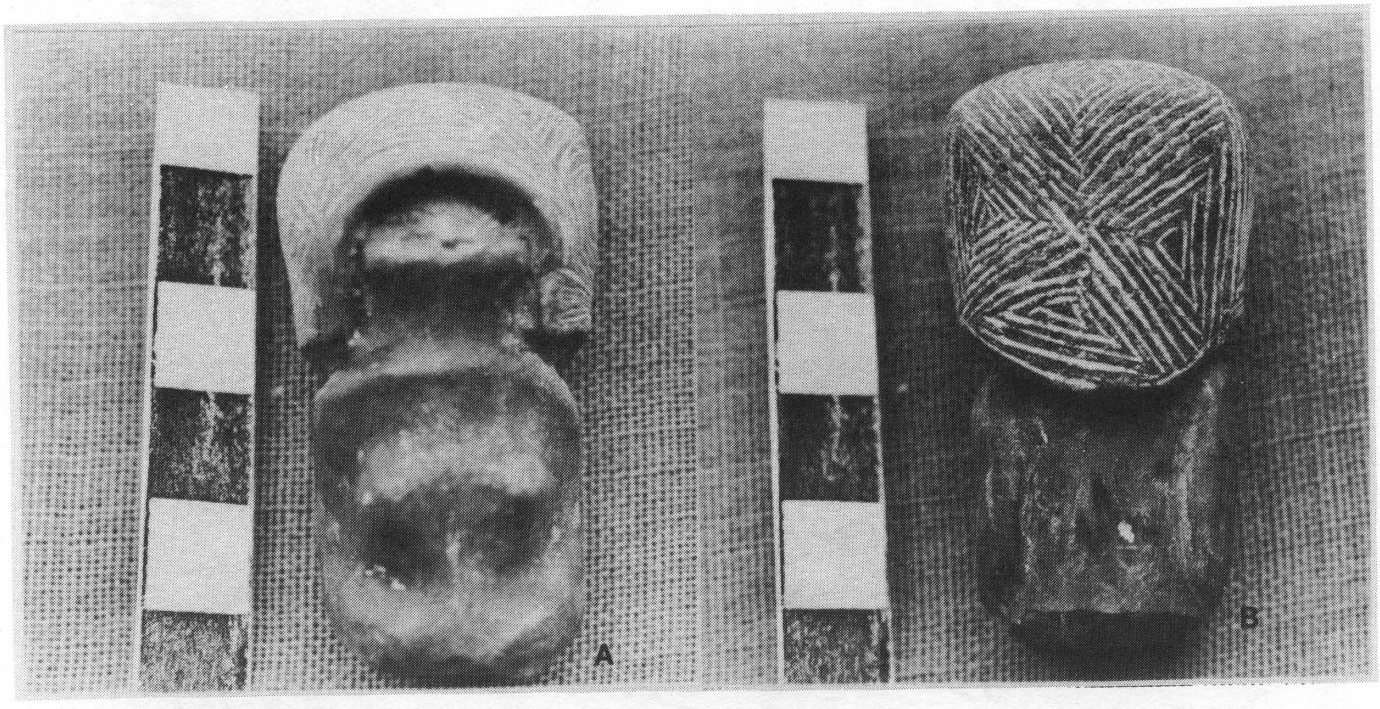
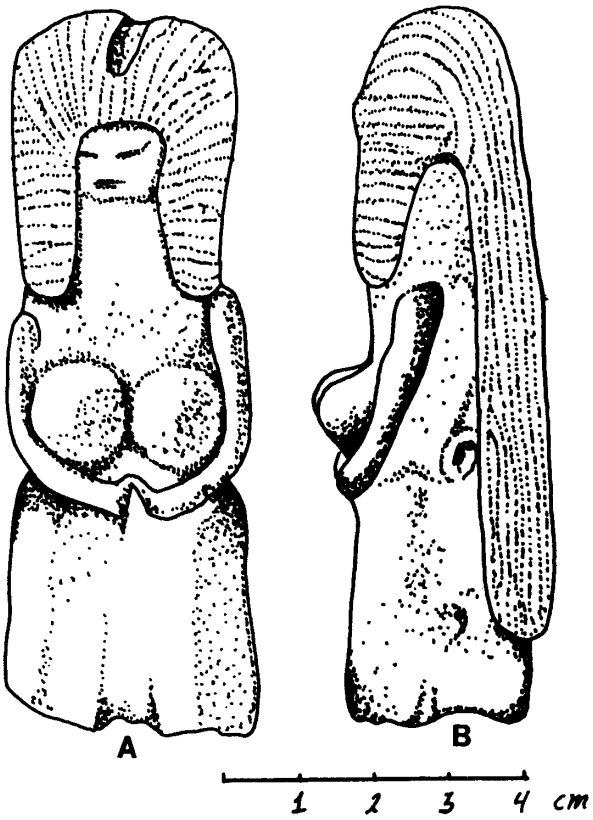


Figure 39. (*above*) Figurine representing the adult stage. Note patterned hairdo. A: front view. B: rear view. After Evans, Meggers, and Estrada 1959:118.

Figure 40. (*below*) Figurine representing the adult stage. Note patterned hairdo. A: front view. B: rear view. Anhalzer Collection, Quito.



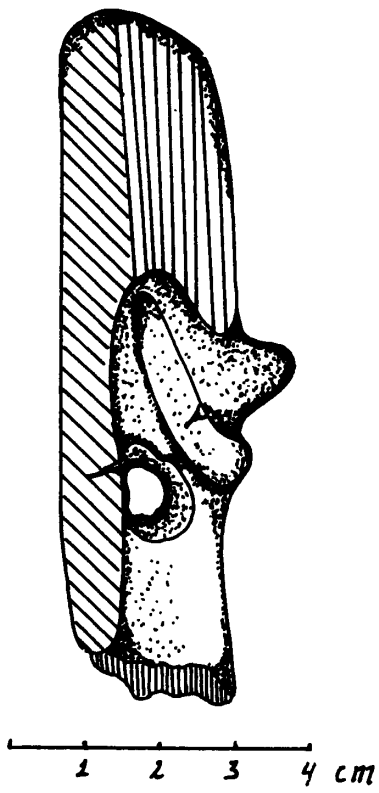
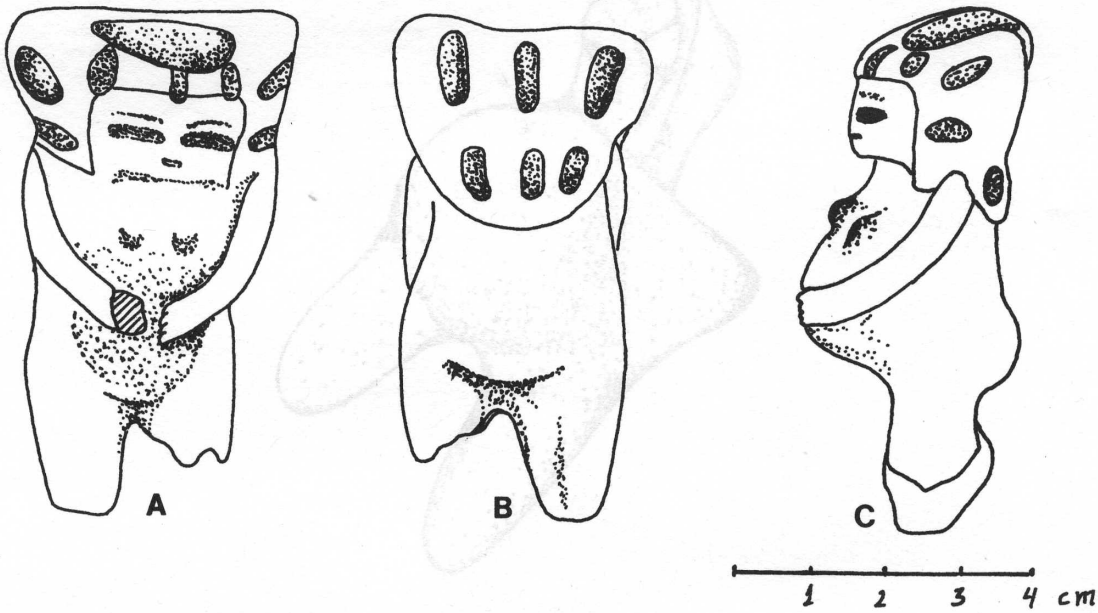


Figure 41. (*above*) Adult pendant figurine. A: front view. B: profile view. After Evans, Meggers, and Estrada 1959:119.

Figure 42. (*below*) Adult pendant figurine, profile view. Di Capua Collection, Quito.

Figure 43. Snuff-inhaler figurine. Museo del Banco Central, Guayaquil. Accession number GA-5-2356-82. Photo courtesy of Olaf Holm.



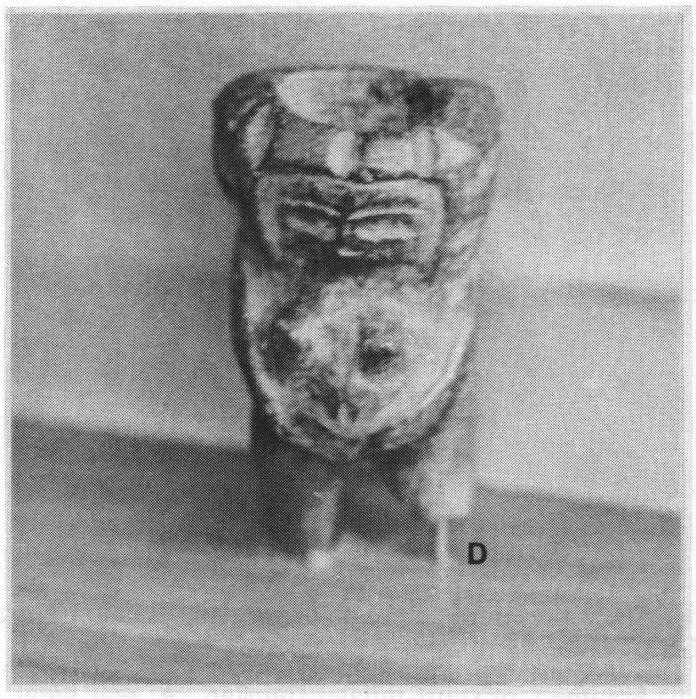
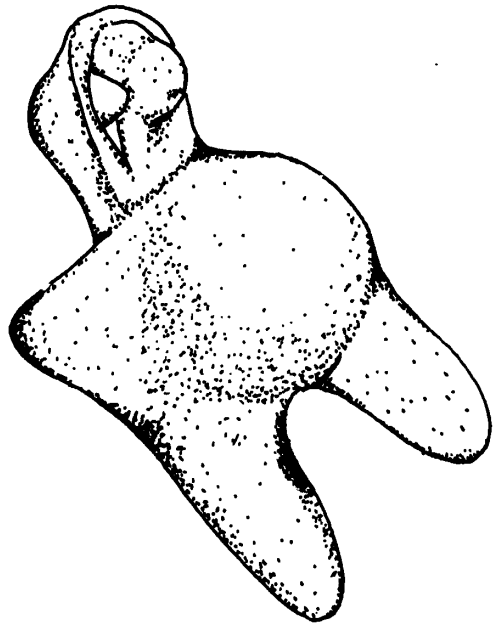
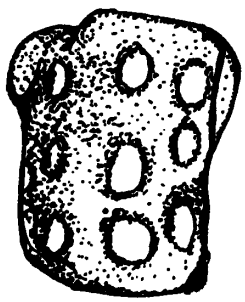
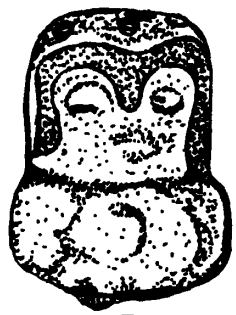


Figure 44. Snuff-inhaler figurine of a pregnant woman. A: drawing, front view. B: drawing, rear view. C: drawing, profile. D: photo, front view. Anhalzer Collection, Quito.





A



B

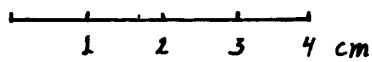
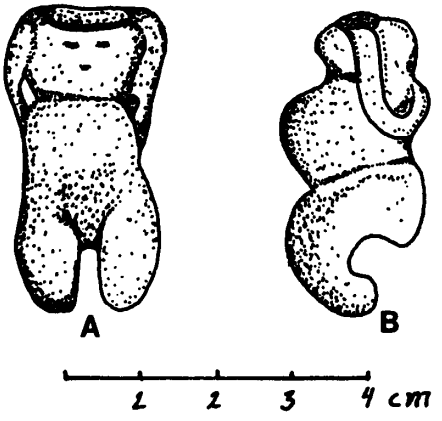


Figure 45. (*above*) Figurine representing a pregnant woman. Banco Central del Ecuador, Quito. Accession number 2-1-83.

Figure 46. (*below, left*) Fragment of snuff-inhaler figurine. A: rear view. B: front view. After Marcos and Manrique 1988:51.

Figure 47. (*below, right*) Snuff-inhaler figurine of a pregnant woman. Height 4.4 cm. After Lathrap, Collier, and Chandra 1975:figure 64.



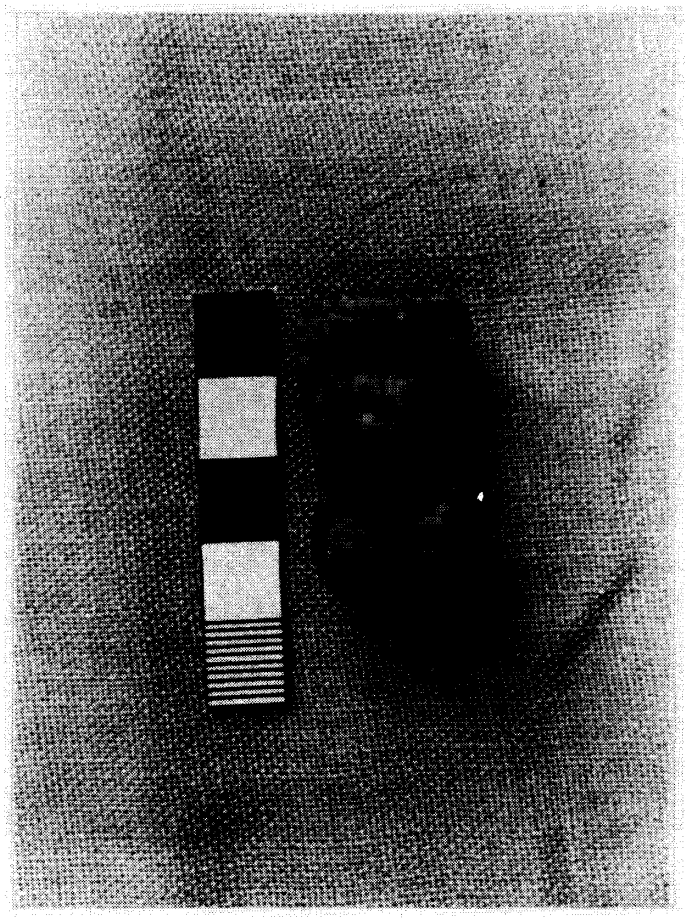
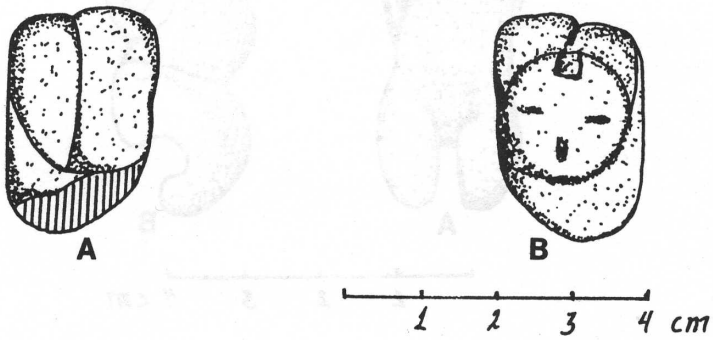


Figure 48. Figurine of a pregnant woman, perhaps kneeling to give birth. A: drawing, front view. B: profile view. C: photo. Anhalzer Collection, Quito.



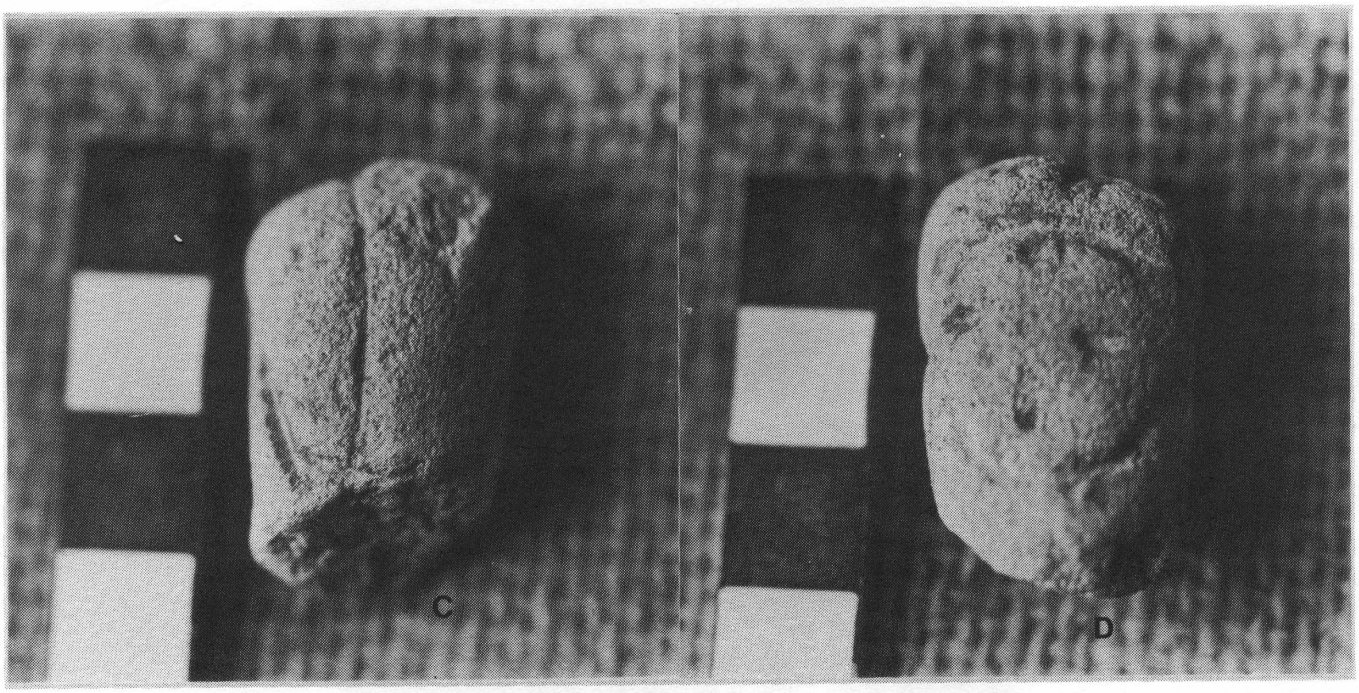
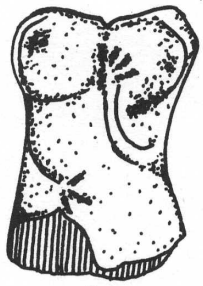
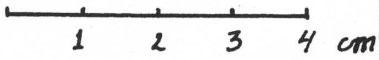
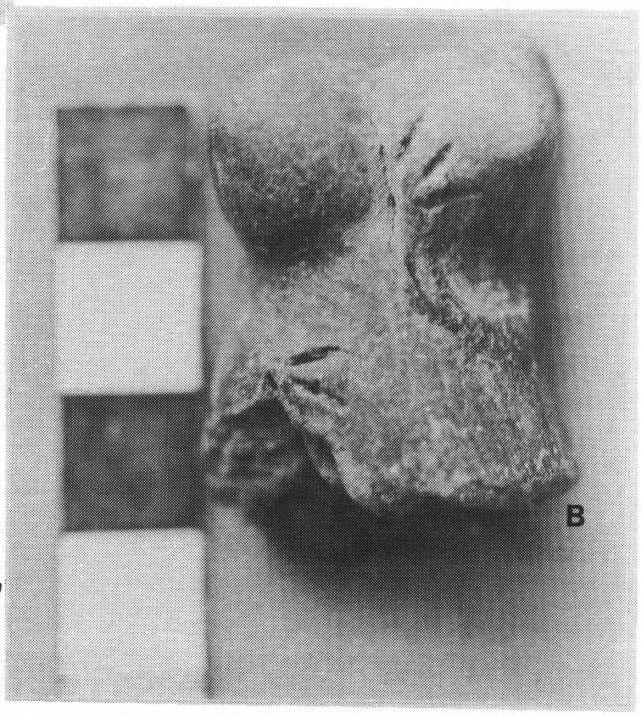


Figure 49. Lithic example of a half-depilated head from the La Clementina site. A: drawing, rear view. B: drawing, front view. C: photo, rear view. D: photo, front view.



A





B

Figure 50. (*above*) Figurine with hand on chin in a position suggesting silence. Di Capua Collection, Quito.

Figure 51. (*below*) Figurine with left hand on left breast and right hand near pubis. This suggests modesty. A: drawing, front view. B: photo, front view. Di Capua Collection, Quito.